

Like Magic

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Like Magic

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Summary

“Don’t you get it?” Dream said to him in an excited whisper, eyes alight with joyous realization. “You—you’re magical, George!”

“What does that mean?”

“It means you’re like me!”

When George first met the tall, freckled child who called himself Dream, he thought the other boy was bonkers. Strange clothes, a foreign accent, a closely-guarded secret — what was George supposed to make of his new next-door neighbor?

Despite the newcomer's strangeness, the two boys quickly forge a friendship. George soon realizes that he and Dream have a lot more in common than he first thought.

//Dreamnotfound Hogwarts AU//

Notes

Obligatory RPF persona warning and shit. I really should not be writing this because I have midterms soon but oh well. Have a DNF Hogwarts AU

Chapter One || Before

George was six years old when it first happened.

“Mum, *please!* I don’t want to go!” he pleaded with tearful brown eyes, clinging to his mother’s leg as if his life depended on it. Around them, other children were saying their goodbyes to parents and guardians as cheerful teachers escorted the young students into the brightly-colored school building.

“Heavens, George! It’s only a few hours!” George’s mother exclaimed as she attempted to pry her son’s fingers from her thigh. Unfortunately for her, George’s grip only tightened.

“No! *Please*, Mum, *please* don’t leave me!” the little boy continued to sob while his mother shot apologetic glances at the patient school staff.

“I’m really sorry,” she said to her son’s waiting teaching assistant, “George is not usually like this. He’s usually such a sweet, friendly — oh, goodness, what on *Earth* is happening over there?”

George’s mother pointed a finger to the drinking fountain by the school’s entrance, which suddenly began to shake and emit shrill creaking noises. George, oblivious to the distraction, continued to wail. The overwhelming fear he felt at his looming abandonment caused him to cry even harder, his little body shuddering with every sob.

George could feel the despair in the pit of his stomach — it grew with each passing second, making it hard for him to breathe. The feeling intensified, became an awful anxiety that mounted until George *couldn’t hold it in anymore*.

Boom!

The drinking fountain exploded, sending bits of metal flying everywhere and causing jets of water to drench nearby parents and teachers. Shouts erupted as people scrambled to avoid being hit by debris. One of the nearby homeroom teachers began frantically waving his arms and shouting instructions at the crowd in an attempt to calm people down, but no one paid him attention.

All at once, George felt weightless.

The fear and despair that had threatened to suffocate him only moments prior suddenly released him, leaving George with a deep sense of relief. His whole body felt tingly and warm and like the smallest breeze could lift him up and carry him away.

The feeling hardly wavered even as George finally glanced up at the scene before him and registered the cause of all the commotion, his mother tugging on his arm to pull him away from the chaos.

The first day of school was delayed that day due to a random pipe malfunction. George only smiled as his frazzled mother led him away to their parked car and drove them home.

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Strange incidents kept happening after that.

Most of the time, they were small things. A light bulb shattering when George became startled by a loud noise. Asparagus vanishing from his plate at the dinner table after he refused to eat his vegetables. A pillow suddenly appearing underneath him to cushion his fall down the stairs.

Sometimes, however, the incidents were much more significant. His most prominent memory of one such occasion was when a boy in his class called him a crybaby and didn't let him play tag with the other children in the schoolyard. The other children in his class were always so *mean*.

George couldn't help it that he wore his emotions on his sleeve. His mother always called him a *sensitive boy*, but his classmates didn't look so fondly upon boys who cried.

"Look at him! He's going to cry again! Aren't you, Georgie?" Simon taunted, eliciting similar taunts from the other boys and giggles from most of the girls.

George's face went red and his lip quivered, but he refused to give the bullies the satisfaction of seeing him fall apart. So he just stood there and listened to his classmates make fun of him, absorbing every unkind word and mean laugh until he was physically shaking with the effort of holding back his tears.

That was when he felt it.

He could feel something warm, a familiar tingling sensation spreading outwards from his chest. It filled him with an odd burst of energy that made his hands grow hot and his heart beat so loudly that his ears were filled with nothing but its quickly increasing thumps.

His vision began to blur as the children continued taunting him. "I hate you, Simon! I hate you *all!*" he shouted, tears finally spilling over as the tingling sensation exploded out of him in one sharp burst.

He gasped, frantically wiping at his face with his sleeve, then squeezed his eyes shut, fully expecting to hear more jeers at his display of weakness.

To his surprise, none came.

He cracked his eyes open and looked up, but his classmates were no longer paying him any attention because their gazes were all fixed on Simon's face.

Simon's red, splotchy, rapidly swelling face.

"What's happening to me? Help! Miss Andrews, *help!*" Simon screamed, clawing at his tomato-red cheeks. Soon the other boy couldn't even talk because his face was so swollen. George just watched on in shock, covering his open mouth with his still-warm hands.

An allergic reaction, the nurse had told the class afterwards. The children were all reminded not to bring nuts of any sort to school. Simon was absent from class for a whole week after that, much to George's satisfaction.

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George was ten years old when he first saw the strange boy.

George had been reading a book under the shade of an oak tree in his backyard, enjoying the freedom of his summer holiday. He was just about to go inside to grab something to drink when — *SMACK!* — something large and heavy came flying out of nowhere and hit him in the head.

He groaned and cradled his skull, the pain from the impact causing him to see black spots. It was several moments before he could sit up again and identify the offending mystery object, a large leather ball that had come to a stop in the grass a meter away.

George eyed the ball curiously, wondering where it could have come from. He glanced around, scanning the area for the ball's owner, but saw no one. After a moment of contemplation, he reached forward and tentatively picked the thing up. He turned the object over in his hands and was surprised by how weightless the ball felt in his hands. He was just about to give it an experimental toss when he noticed movement in his peripheral vision.

There was someone — a boy, George realized — running towards him.

As the boy approached, George could make out some of his features. The other boy was tall, but looked to be about his age, with a head of dirty-blond hair and a smattering of freckles across his face. The strangest thing of all, though, was the boy's outfit — he wore what looked to George like a dress with long, flowing sleeves. Certainly an odd choice of clothing for anyone, let alone for a boy in the middle of summer.

"Erm...hello?" George said tentatively once the other boy was within earshot. The strange boy paused to catch his breath, running a hand through his wind-ruffled hair before finally acknowledging George.

"Hello. I accidentally threw the quaffle too hard, so...sorry about that," the strange boy said apologetically once his breathing had returned to normal.

Two things stuck out to George immediately when the other boy spoke. First, he had a foreign accent. Second, he had used a word that George had never heard before, which was quite annoying because George took pride in his knowledge of the English language. Needless to say, George had many questions he wanted to ask this strange boy, but his thoughts were too frazzled to put any of them into proper sentences.

So, much to George's embarrassment, all that came out of his own mouth was a single word. "Pardon?"

The other boy shot him a look as if to say, *are you stupid?*

"The quaffle. In your hands. I would like it back."

"The...oh."

George slowly handed the leather ball over to the other boy, who snatched it back immediately.

"Thanks," the boy said once the ball was tucked under his arm. Immediately, he turned around and made to run away again. George felt a surge of curiosity suddenly overtake him, and without a second thought he called out for the other boy to wait. Immediately, the dirty blond spun around and looked at George expectantly.

George could feel his cheeks reddening. There was something piercing about the boy's gaze. Swallowing his sudden nervousness, George cleared his throat and thought of something else to

say.

“I haven’t seen you before. Do you live nearby?” George found himself asking.

The other boy eyed him up and down before pointing to a one-storey house across the way. “That’s my house. I just moved here,” he answered.

“Oh! That makes sense. I would have recognized you from school, otherwise,” George mused. However, the other boy’s brow furrowed at the mention of school.

“No...I’m not old enough to go to school, I haven’t gotten my owl yet.”

And just like that, George was back to being confused.

“O...*kay*. Where did you move here from, then? You don’t sound...local,” George said awkwardly. At this, the other boy smiled and ran his hand through his hair again.

“Well, I was born here, but my parents moved to Florida when I was very little. We just moved back here last week.”

George’s eyes widened in amazement at this response. “Florida? As in, America?” he asked, awe-struck. He’d never met anyone from America before. The most far away place George had ever been to was France when his parents decided to take him on holiday one Christmas, and George hadn’t even liked it much.

“Yep!” the other boy said proudly. “My dad’s from here, but my mom’s American. They’d both kill me if they knew I’d been playing with the quidditch equipment by myself, so don’t say anything if you see them.”

“Quidditch equipment?” George repeated, confused.

“Well, yeah. Everyone played quodpot back home, but Dad says I have to learn quidditch if I ever want to make friends at Hog...*oh!*” The boy gasped and covered his mouth with his hand theatrically. George quirked an eyebrow at this, wondering what in the world this strange boy was on about.

“Well? What’s a quidditch?” George pushed when the other boy continued to stare at him with wide eyes.

“I...I’m sorry, but I wasn’t supposed to...I forgot...” the other boy stumbled over his words, much to George’s annoyance.

“What? Forgot *what?* ”

“I forgot that everyone around here is No-Maj!”

“*What?*”

“Ugh, sorry, I guess you call yourselves Muggles. Or...wait...what do you call yourselves?”

“What is a bloody Muggle?” George was quite fed up with this strange boy in his strange dress spouting his strange nonsense words. He didn’t even know what the word *Muggle* meant, but he could already guess by the way the other boy said it that it wasn’t something George wanted to be called.

“Look...sorry, I’m not supposed to talk about certain things with No-Maj— I mean, uh, strangers.”

The other boy looked nervous as he gave the excuse, his eyes darting to look at everything except George.

George was still quite skeptical and definitely not past the whole "Muggle" thing, but not talking to strangers was at least something he could understand. His own mother told him all the time not to talk to strangers, after all.

"Well...alright. I guess I can understand that," George said, nodding his head slowly.

The other boy looked relieved at this response, expression visibly brightening. "What's your name?" he asked George with a smile.

After a few seconds, George couldn't help but smile as well; the boy's cheerfulness was contagious. "I'm George," he said in a much more non-confrontational voice. "What's your name?"

"I'm Dream!" the other boy declared proudly, his face breaking into an even wider grin. George rolled his eyes at this response.

"*Dream?* Come off it, surely that's not your name."

The other boy — *Dream* — looked offended by George's comment. "Why? What's wrong with Dream?" he pouted.

"It's not a normal name that normal people have. I've never met anyone called *Dream*."

"Well it's *my* name so now you *have* met someone named Dream!" The other boy huffed and put his free hand on his hip, making George crack a smile at the silly pose.

Several more moments passed in silence as the boys stared at each other contemplatively. Eventually, Dream told George that he had to return home — something about how he needed to "stay inside the *Muggle-repelling charm*" — and ran back towards his house, leaving George alone once again in his backyard.

Despite the odd name and very strange appearance, George felt drawn to this new "Dream" boy. He was nothing like George's mates at school — not that he had very many of those. Perhaps it was just curiosity, but George found himself hoping that he'd see the other boy again soon.

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Much to George's disappointment, he didn't see Dream again for two weeks.

Without meaning to, George found himself spending more and more time outside under the oak tree, casting frequent glances at the small house in the distance. He kept hoping to see a tell-tale shock of dirty blond hair peeking out from the bushes or the sudden flash of a leather ball sailing through the air, but to his dismay he saw no visible signs of life coming from the small house across the way.

At the end of the second Dream-less week, George thought he saw movement in the other boy's garden. Extremely curious, He decided he would walk closer and peek around a few of the bushes. Not in a *creepy* way, of course; he would be poking his head around purely for research purposes.

The mid-afternoon sun warmed the top of his head as George strolled across the grassy area between his house and Dream's. He could hear birds chirping in the nearby trees; occasionally, one landed on the grass nearby and pecked at some unseen insect before taking to the skies once more. It was the perfect summer afternoon: warm, lightly breezy, and peaceful. George loved days like these, which was part of the reason why Dream's absence seemed so odd to him. Why would anyone want to stay cooped up in such wonderful weather?

A rustle from a nearby bush caught George's attention, making him stop in his tracks. He held his breath, waiting for more signs of life, but he couldn't see any movement in the shrubs. As stealthily as he could, George took one, two, three steps forward before stopping once more to listen.

That was when he heard it.

The rustling sounded once more, accompanied by a faint grumbling noise. George's eyes widened when he saw a few of the shrub's leaves move in a way that couldn't have simply been due to the breeze. Sure enough, moments later the leaves were pushed aside by what looked to George like tiny brown hands. The boy gasped when a round, miniature, human-like head emerged from the dense growth. Soon he could see the creature's entire body: it was very small and had leathery brown skin with bony feet. Its head looked far too large. George could only stare as it blinked its beady eyes, seemingly adjusting to the sunlight, before meeting George's gaze.

George didn't make a sound as the creature looked him up and down. Several tense moments passed before it finally did something. Eventually, the small beast opened its mouth, revealing a set of sharp, yellow teeth.

"Bugger off," it said in that same deep, grumbly voice.

George screamed.

The creature looked taken aback, quickly darting back into the shrub and out of George's sight. George backed away from the bush, eyes wide with fear and mind racing. He had never seen anything resembling that creature in his entire life. There was no way that thing was an animal — no, definitely not — but it certainly wasn't human either. So then...how did it speak?

What in the *world* was going on?

The sound of approaching footsteps snapped George out of his panicked thoughts.

"Who's screaming? What are you— *George?*"

George turned to find the very boy he'd spent two weeks thinking about standing mere feet away, a surprised look on his face. Unlike the last time they had crossed paths, on this occasion Dream wore a much more normal outfit consisting of denim jeans, a dark t-shirt, and trainers.

"Dream! Oh my god, there was a *monster* in *that* bush!" George pointed at the bush, silently hoping Dream would believe him. Dream looked confused.

"What? A monster? What do you mean?" he asked. George then spent several moments describing the strange creature that had emerged from the shrub while Dream listened attentively. When George recalled how the monster had told him to bugger off, Dream's eyes widened in sudden realization.

He took a long look at George, as if wondering how to approach the subject of the strange creature, before finally saying something. "Well, that does seem... *weird*," he finally admitted with a sigh. "But I really don't think it was anything unusual. You're probably just, uh, imagining things."



“Really? You’re telling me I *imagined* a monster living in the bushes near your house?”

“Uh...yeah.”

George was silent with disbelief. Dream *had* to have been pulling some sort of prank on him. There was no logical explanation for what George had seen, yet the boy opposite him didn’t look concerned in the slightest. Quite the opposite, actually — Dream looked sheepish as he absentmindedly pushed a pebble around in the grass with the tip of his shoe.

Just as George was about to say something else, Dream suddenly straightened up and looked at him with a shocked expression. “George! How are you even *here*?” he asked with alarm.

“W-what do you mean?” George stuttered, taken aback by the abrupt shift in tone, “I just walked over. You know, from my house? The one just over *there*?” he pointed to his own house not far away and raised a concerned eyebrow at the incredulous boy.

“No, George,” Dream huffed in exasperation, “don’t you have, like, something you need to do? Somewhere else to be, maybe? Like right now? Immediately?”

George snorted at the ridiculous line of questioning. Here he was telling Dream about an actual monster he had seen near the boy’s house and all Dream wanted to do was ask him silly questions.

“Um, no? If I had somewhere else to go I wouldn’t be here— Dream, are you even listening to me?! You’re not *at all* worried about a monster in your bushes?”

“How are you *standing* so close to my house?” Dream asked again.

“My *god*, Dream, I have *feet*. That’s how.”

“But Mom said that No-Majs can’t come this close without remembering something urgent they have to do! This doesn’t make any sense!”

“You know what, Dream? You’re bonkers. I’m going home,” George huffed, crossing his arms as he turned around to walk back. He made it about a meter before he heard Dream call after him.

“Wait, George! Okay, fine. You probably saw a gnome.”

George took a deep breath and turned around. “A gnome?”

“Yep,” said Dream quietly. “They’re pests. My dad always tells them to bugger off, which is probably why the one you saw said that to you.”

“So...gnomes. I saw a...gnome?” George asked with a note of disbelief.

“Yeah. Mom hates them ‘cuz they steal the tomatoes from her garden.”

George made a mental note to ask his own mother if she’d ever seen a gnome that looked like *that*.

“Um...George? I’m sorry for acting weird or whatever. I’m just kinda confused. You’re the first No-Maj I’ve met here, and—”

“Would you *please* tell me what a ‘No-Maj’ is at least?” George interjected.

Dream looked physically uncomfortable at the question. He shuffled his feet awkwardly and avoided George’s gaze, radiating unease.

For some reason, George felt a pang of regret at Dream's obvious discomfort. George didn't know why, but in that moment all he wanted was to see a smile grace the other boy's freckled face.

"I guess...it's okay if you can't tell me now. I get it." George did not, in fact, get it, but he was willing to overlook Dream's strange lexicon for now. Immediately, the other boy brightened, grinning from ear to ear in a way that made George's heart skip a beat.

"Thank you, George. You seem really cool," Dream happily told the other boy, causing George's cheeks to turn a light pink color. "Wanna do something fun? I haven't had anyone else to play with in forever."

"Forever? Aren't you, like, my age?" George asked as the boys began walking back towards George's house.

"Hmm, that depends. How old are you?"

"Ten. I'll be eleven in November."

"Well then we're *almost* the same age. I'll be ten in a few months. I'm kinda surprised, though," Dream continued nonchalantly, "you're pretty short for a ten year old."

"Hey! Maybe you're just freakishly tall," George quipped, bumping the other boy lightly with his shoulder before he could think any better of it. Thankfully, Dream didn't seem to mind; in fact, George saw the other boy's nose crinkle in a smile.

Since Dream was new to the neighborhood, George decided to take him down to see the local park. The boys chatted and joked while they walked. Soon, all the awkwardness of their previous encounters was forgotten as the boys took turns asking each other questions. Dream was particularly taken aback when George revealed that his favorite color was blue because it was one of the only colors he could see properly.

"What do you mean, *colorblind*? How can you not see colors? What color are my eyes, then?" George chuckled when Dream pried his eyelids wide open with his fingers.

"Oh my *god*, stop!" George laughed at the other boy's antics. "I can *see* color, just not the way that you do. I can't really see red or green. And to answer your question, your eyes are kind of...greenish, I guess? I can't be sure."

"But you just said you can't see green! So how did you know I have green eyes?"

"Well, green and yellow look the same to me. And people don't have yellow eyes, now, do they?"

"Well *some* people do."

George rolled his eyes but didn't bother arguing further. When the boys made it to the park, Dream made a beeline for the swings.

"THIS IS SO MUCH FUN!" the boy screamed in his loud American accent as he built up momentum, causing quite a few heads to turn their way. George didn't mind, though. It was funny to watch Dream use a swing set so enthusiastically. If George didn't know better, he would have guessed that the other boy had never seen a playground before.

They spent hours together in that park, playing tag and hide-and-seek and all sorts of other games that George remembered from the schoolyard. George liked that Dream sounded like a tea kettle

when he laughed.

When the sun began to set, the boys finally decided to return home. George couldn't even remember the last time he had so much fun.

"Hey, George? Do you wanna do something fun again tomorrow?" Dream asked hopefully on the way back, eyes shining with excitement.

"Of course I do," George answered with no hesitation.

When his mother finally told him to go to bed, George could barely fall asleep. His mind was racing with ideas of what the boys would do together the next day.

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"Oh, Geoooo-ooorge! "

George covered his mouth with his hand to keep from accidentally making noise. Dream wasn't just good at hide-and-seek; he was downright *terrifying*.

They were playing in the wooded area behind their houses. George actually felt pretty confident in his hiding spot. It had taken him three rounds to locate the perfect tree: large and wide at the base, with plenty of thick branches to support his weight and dense leaf clusters to hide him. He was perched high above the ground, hidden amongst the greenery as he watched Dream search the nearby bushes.

"I know you're here somewhere, Georgie!" Dream called out, scanning the edges of the clearing for signs of his target. George was careful to remain absolutely still. Dream was like the T-Rex from *Jurassic Park* — his eyes could catch even the *slightest* movement. It was like the other boy had a supernatural gift for finding people.

"I'm gonna get you, George! Come out, come out, wherever you are!"

George hardly dared to breathe as Dream came ever closer to his hiding spot. If George just stayed completely silent and didn't move a muscle, maybe—

Suddenly, Dream tensed. As if in slow motion, the taller boy turned around to face the tree and tilted his head upwards, eyes scanning higher and higher until his predatory gaze met George's own. A few tense moments passed where Dream just smiled unnervingly at George while the shorter boy clung to a tree branch. George swallowed nervously, and Dream suddenly came out of his trance.

"I see you! COME *HERE*, GEORGE!"

With frightening speed, Dream launched himself at the base of the oak tree and began to climb. His long limbs gave him an advantage when it came to climbing, and he found new footholds and handholds effortlessly. George couldn't get down safely without Dream catching him, so he did the only thing his panicked brain told him he *could* do: he climbed even higher up.

"Dream, *stop!* Please, just let me go!" George squealed as he grabbed hold of another branch above his head and desperately tried to pull himself upwards. He could hear Dream catching up to him;

when George glanced down, he once again met the bloodthirsty gaze of his hunter and yelped.

He's too close! George's frantic brain registered. Desperately, George placed his left foot on another branch, preparing to climb even higher, only to hear a sickening *crack* as the branch splintered under his weight.

Panic seized the shorter boy as he lost his balance and fell backwards. Dream screamed and tried to grab onto George as he fell, but it was no use.

I am going to die, was George's only coherent thought as gravity began to pull his body swiftly towards the ground. He felt a familiar warm tingling sensation begin to spread through his body as he neared his demise.

Yet, somehow, George didn't die.

What should have been a bone-crushing, spine-breaking, life-threatening fall was instead a slow, gravity-defying descent in which he floated gracefully to the ground like a feather. There was only a soft *thud* when his back met the green forest floor.

Dimly, George registered a noise somewhere behind him as Dream hurriedly climbed down the tree.

"Oh my god! George! Are you okay? How did you *do* that?" Dream shouted as he jogged towards the spot where George lay.

"I...I don't..." George's brain was far too frazzled to put any of his thoughts into words. Instead, he opened his eyes — when had he closed them? — and stared up at his friend's concerned face. Dream was looking him over, checking him for obvious injuries, and was visibly confused when he found none.

After a few moments, Dream helped George get into a sitting position with his back against the base of the tree. George was still too shocked to say anything, so he simply listened as Dream assaulted him with questions.

"You — you should have died! When I saw you fall, I thought you were about to crack your head open or something! But...but you're alive! George, how did you do that? How did you *fall* like that? I've never seen anyone, let alone a freaking *No-Maj*, pull off that kinda stunt! George, dude, what *was* that? Tell me how—"

"*Dream.*" George finally interrupted. Dream immediately stopped talking and fixed George with an intense stare that made the shorter boy want to squirm. George took a deep breath before speaking again. "I don't know what happened. I...I just fell, and I thought I was dead, but then...somehow... I wasn't. I just..." George trailed off, furrowing his eyebrows as he recalled his near-death experience.

"I guess...I just don't know. I can't explain it." George said with a sigh as he felt his heart finally begin to fall back into its normal rhythm. Beside him, Dream was deep in thought.

"Could it...could it have been *me*?" the other boy asked under his breath, clearly thinking out loud. "Maybe," he muttered, "maybe I did it without realizing..."

George tapped his friend on the shoulder to get his attention. "What do you mean, 'maybe you did it'? What could you have even done?" George couldn't begin to understand how Dream thought he'd been able to *alter gravity*. The mere thought of his friend having strange, physics-defying superpowers was laughable.

When Dream didn't answer the question, George nudged him again. "Dreeee-eeeam," he whined. "Dream, did you hear me? I asked you a question."

Suddenly, Dream turned around and George was taken aback by the seriousness of the other boy's expression. "George," he said with no trace of humor in his voice. "I have a secret that I *really* want to tell you. But I can't. Dad told me that if I ever told a No-Maj, I could get in big trouble."

George felt a pang of hurt at Dream's confession. Although the boys had only known each other for a little over a month, George already felt like he could trust Dream with anything, even if Dream still refused to explain what a *No-Maj* was. Perhaps it was silly of him to think that Dream would feel the same way.

"It's okay," George replied quietly. "I guess you haven't known me for very long. It makes sense that you don't trust me."

George didn't want to meet Dream's eyes and accidentally reveal the hurt he felt, so he didn't see the way Dream's expression changed from serious to flabbergasted.

"What? Don't be crazy, George, of course I trust you!" the American tried to reassure his friend, who was still staring at his own lap. "Please, George — it's not like that. I *want* to tell you the secret, but I just *can't*. You've gotta believe me."

George finally met Dream's gaze, feeling some of his hurt ebb away as he registered the pleading tone in his friend's voice. "You know I wouldn't tell anyone, right? I know how to keep a secret," he said, hoping Dream would trust him in spite of his reservations.

"I *know*, George. It's just...maybe I'll tell you at some point. When I'm sure that I won't get in trouble."

"Okay, Dream. I don't want you to get in trouble," George replied softly. He meant it; the idea of Dream being punished for telling George top-secret information hurt to think about.

Dream smiled and nudged George with his elbow. "You're basically my only friend, you know that?" he remarked. George's heart stuttered at the admission.

"Really? What about your friends in Florida?"

"I don't have many. And they haven't spoken to me since I moved away," Dream confessed, voice tinged with sadness. Eager to cheer up his new friend, George gave Dream a playful punch on the shoulder.

"Well, you're my best friend here, too," he told Dream in a friendly voice before standing up and dusting off his jeans. "Now let's head back home. I'm starving."

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"Do you fancy a walk down to the park?"

The boys were sitting side by side on a log facing a small pond a little ways away from their neighborhood. Dream didn't say anything, prompting George to ask the question again.

“*Dream!* I asked if you fancied a walk to the park!” he repeated loudly, finally managing to snap the other boy out of whatever trance he’d been in. To his credit, Dream looked apologetic enough once he realized George had been trying to get his attention.

“Oh, I can’t today,” he said with a sigh. “Mom doesn’t want me staying out too late ‘cuz she wants me to get some sleep before tomorrow.”

George tilted his head, puzzled. Dream almost never had problems staying out until dark. “What’s tomorrow?” he asked, curious.

“My birthday. I usually wake up really early ‘cuz I get so excited. I *really* want to know what my parents got me this year,” Dream added, an eager look on his face.

George didn’t know what to say; he’d completely forgotten about Dream’s birthday. He should have realized his birthday was soon, given that Dream had previously mentioned it was in August, but the other boy hadn’t brought it up at all since they first met. George was suddenly overcome with a feeling of panic at the realization that he didn’t have anything for his new best friend in terms of a gift.

“Oh, yeah,” George said, trying not to sound too panicked. “Your birthday. Are you going to be having a party?”

Dream sighed and shook his head. “No. I wouldn’t have anyone except you to invite. My parents will give me a present and my mom will bake a cake, but that’s about it.”

George hated how *resigned* Dream sounded, like it was a given that he would have a boring birthday. Everyone deserved a fun birthday, especially when it was their tenth birthday.

And just like that, George knew what he had to do the next day.

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“George! Where are we going?” Dream asked George for the umpteenth time since they’d met that day. George had presented Dream with a blindfold when the boys met up at their usual spot by the oak tree, and Dream had put it on (albeit reluctantly). Now, George held Dream’s hand as he guided the taller boy through the forest and towards the surprise he’d stayed up late working on the night before.

After several more minutes, the pair stepped into the center of a small clearing. George led Dream to a large tree stump in the center on which sat a medium-sized box covered with wrapping paper.

“Okay, you can take it off now,” George said, suddenly nervous. What if he’d gotten it all wrong? What if Dream hated the gift? What if this whole thing was a stupid waste of—

“You got me a present? *Awesome!*” Dream gasped enthusiastically, and all at once George’s doubts vanished. The other boy didn’t waste any time unwrapping his gift; he attacked the wrapping paper like it had personally offended him, tearing off large pieces of paper and discarding them hastily. When the box was revealed, Dream went quiet.

“Wow,” he said, a hint of reverence in his tone. “You got me cubes, George.”

George laughed and pointed to the words on the box. “Not just *cubes*, you idiot, I got you *LEGOs*.”

Dream’s eyes widened as he read the label in amazement. “I love it,” he said warmly, bright green eyes meeting George’s own.

“These are little plastic blocks that you can fit together to build things.” George explained, “I know how much you love building castles with me out of rocks and old bricks, so I thought you might like building with easier material.”

Dream turned the box over in his hands before giving it an experimental shake. He looked positively delighted at the sounds the plastic cubes made as they rattled around in the box. “You’re the *best*, George!” he exclaimed joyfully before throwing his arms around the shorter boy.

George was blushing, but he couldn’t bring himself to care. After Dream let go of him, George pulled out a tin of biscuits and a bottle of cola from his backpack. “And now, Dream, we are going to have a birthday feast in your honor!”

As the sun began to set and the boys were walking home, Dream made a declaration.

“That was the best birthday ever, George. Thank you.”

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“Oh, Geooooo-ooorge!”

“Leave me alone, Dream!”

“Stop running, Gogi!”

“I said *don’t call me that!*”

“I’M GONNA GET YOU, *GOGI!*”

George didn’t dare look behind him. They were playing a game that Dream called “Gnomes and Jarveys,” and this time it was George’s turn to be the gnome. Dream had tried to explain to him what a Jarvey was before they started playing, but George had never even seen a ferret before, let alone a huge one that could talk. Definitions didn’t matter, though, he supposed; all that George needed to know was that he was the prey and Dream was the predator.

George’s lungs were starting to burn with the effort of running for so long. Dream was *fast* — even though George had a head start, it wouldn’t be long until the taller boy caught up to him and tackled him to the ground.

George’s stomach dropped when he realized he was running straight towards the fence that bordered the small forest. A dead end.

Evidently, Dream had come to the same realization, because he cackled maniacally.

“Nowhere to go, GEORGE! You’re *dead!* ”

As George neared the fence, his eyes searched for something — anything — to jump over or climb. He *needed* to figure out a way to escape Dream, and he needed to do it *fast*. But there was

nothing he could do, nowhere else he could run because he could practically *feel* Dream breathing down his neck —

The tingling sensation started in George's chest just as he felt Dream's hand reach forward and grab his shoulder.

George was too late. Dream was upon him.

George closed his eyes and allowed the tingling feeling to intensify, bracing himself for the pain that would inevitably follow being tackled to the ground.

And, just like when George had fallen out of the tree, the pain never came.

When George opened his eyes, he saw that Dream was on the other side of the fence.

No, that couldn't be right; *George* was somehow on the other side of the fence. Dream was staring at him with a look of absolute shock on his face.

"George," he said, eyes wide with shock.

"Yes?"

"You're on the other side of the fence, George."

"Yes," George replied, puzzled.

"But you didn't jump over it."

"No."

Dream took a careful step forward and fixed George with his piercing green gaze. The taller boy was thinking so hard that George could practically *see* the cogs in his head turning.

"You apparated, George," Dream finally spoke.

George tilted his head at the unfamiliar word. "I don't know what that means."

Dream shook his head a few times as if to clear it, seemingly at a loss for words. George hoped that Dream was *okay* with so-called "apparating" thing he'd just done. It wasn't like George had done it on purpose, after all. Strange, unexplainable things just...happened around him. It was part of the reason his classmates found him off-putting. But Dream didn't mind that he was odd, right?

...Right?

After another few tense moments in which George didn't even dare breathe, Dream surprised George by doubling over and letting out the loudest *wheeze*.

"Dream?!" George called out in alarm, grabbing the fence before him in order to get as close as possible to him. The taller boy was bent over, shaking with laughter and struggling to make a coherent sound.

George took a step back from the fence, quickly scanning the perimeter of the fence until he found a gap that he could squeeze through in order to get back to where Dream was. When George finally made it back to his friend, he saw that the other boy had calmed down somewhat, but was still breathing heavily.



George shuffled his feet awkwardly, waiting for Dream to give some sort of explanation for his outburst. The taller boy ran a hand through his messy blond hair and took in a shuddering breath before finally meeting George's gaze.

George had expected Dream to look confused. Angry, even. But the look in the taller boy's eyes was one of pure joy. Dream looked happier than he had when George had thrown him that mini birthday party in the woods.

"I can't believe you just apparated, George," Dream said in a voice tinged with awe.

Nervous and *very* confused, George looked at his feet. "Still don't know what that means," he mumbled.

"I just don't get how I didn't notice it before. The fact that you can come close to my house, the way you fell out of that tree...of *course* you're not a No-Maj," Dream said to himself emphatically.

George huffed at the foreign vocabulary. "*Dream*. Stop it with the strange secret words I don't understand!"

That was when Dream gasped and grinned from ear to ear.

"George!" he exclaimed, "it doesn't have to be a secret anymore!"

At this, George's eyes widened. "You mean...you can tell me your big secret now?"

"Yep!"

"Won't you get in trouble?" George asked, dumbfounded. The other boy merely chuckled at the question before going all quiet again.

"Don't you get it?" Dream said to him in an excited whisper, eyes alight with joyous realization. "You—you're *magical*, George!"

"What does that mean?"

"It means you're like me!"

## Chapter Two || Before

### Chapter Summary

George learns about magic.

### Chapter Notes

Hello! I can't believe the response to the first chapter! I didn't think people would want to read this, but the amazing comments and all the kudos made me want to get the second chapter out as quickly as possible. I hope y'all like it :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

That night as the boys were walking home through the woods, Dream told him everything.

Magic. There was a *name* for the tingling sensation George felt right before something odd and unexplainable happened, and it was magic. Dream told him that the “apparating” thing George had done was uncontrolled magic, as was the way George had been able to defy gravity when he had fallen out of the tree. For once in George’s life, someone was presenting him with an explanation for the series of strange occurrences that defined his existence.

Dream called him a *wizard*, and the term felt right, somehow.

Best of all, George knew Dream’s secret now — the other boy was magical, too.

“You mean you *also* get the warm feeling in your chest that makes strange things happen?” George had asked his friend incredulously. Dream smiled and nodded.

“When you fell out of that tree before, I actually thought it was my magic that saved you. It was weird because I didn’t *feel* my magic flare up, but there was no other explanation, you know?”

George nodded at Dream’s line of reasoning, tilting his head in thought. “Why didn’t you think it could have been me, though?” he questioned.

Dream shrugged and gave George a somewhat apologetic look. “Cuz I thought you were a No-Maj. My parents told me that the closest magical household was a mile away.”

George hummed at this explanation, then let out a tiny gasp as he put together another piece of the Dream puzzle. “So *No-Maj* means ‘no magic?’ That’s what you were calling me all this time?”

Dream chuckled a bit sheepishly. “Yeah. No-Maj is the American way to say it. Around here people call them Muggles.”

“So...you thought I was a Muggle.”

“Yep. But you’re not. You’re just Muggle-born.”

“Muggle-born?”

Dream sighed dramatically and shot George an exasperated look.

“Yes, George, you’re Muggle-born. Your parents are Muggles, so that makes you Muggle-born.”

“Are you Muggle-born?” George asked his friend. Dream looked almost offended at the question, which made George a tad uneasy.

“Me? *What?* No, of course not. I’m a pureblood. My dad’s a Selwyn.”

The way Dream spoke the words with a hint of pride made George reluctant to ask him anything else about the Muggle-born and pureblood stuff.

“If your parents are both magical, does that mean your whole family can make strange things happen when they’re scared or in danger?”

Dream smirked at George’s question. “They can do magic whenever they want, basically. When we get older and go to school, we’ll be able to learn how to control it. Right now we’re kids, so our magic kinda just comes out at random.”

“School? But I already go to school,” George said.

“Not your No-Maj school. I mean Hogwarts. It’s in Scotland. It’s the best magic school in the whole world, which is why my parents wanted to move us back to the UK.”

George’s heart sank. Scotland? His parents would never be able to afford to send him away to a boarding school in Scotland. George said as much to his friend, but Dream merely brushed aside his concerns.

“You’re a wizard, George. There’s no way you’re not going to Hogwarts. Wizards aren’t meant to go to *No-Maj* schools,” Dream said with an eye roll. “Just wait until next year. You’ll see.”

The rest of the walk home went by in much the same fashion, with George asking question after question and Dream answering each and every one, amused by George’s curiosity. When the boys finally arrived at George’s house, Dream bade him farewell and promised to tell him more about magic the next day.

“Wait, Dream,” George said as the taller boy began to walk away. Dream paused, waiting for George to continue. “You promise that what you’re saying is real? It’s not just some... *joke* ... right?”

Dream’s dirty blond hair looked pale under the light of the moon as the taller boy’s lips formed a soft smile.

“You really *are* magic, George. I promise.”

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“What do you mean you can’t come out tomorrow? You said you wanted me to tell you about quidditch, remember?” Dream whined, kicking the dirt in exasperation.

George rolled his eyes at his friend's reaction. Ever since Dream had told George about magic, the boys had spent every day in the woods "practicing," which consisted of each boy trying to startle the other into performing accidental magic. They were largely unsuccessful, although occasionally Dream would scare George enough while playing Gnomes and Jarveys that George would spontaneously apparate a short distance away.

"I told you," George said patiently, "I have to go to school. I'm going into Year Six."

Dream's expression morphed into one of confusion. "What? Why are you going back to No-Maj school?"

"Because...I have to? Because it's the *law*?" George replied, crossing his arms in front of himself. Was Dream thick?

"But you're a wizard. You don't have to spend time with No-Maj kids anymore." Dream spoke the words like they were obvious, like George hadn't *just* learned about magic two weeks earlier. His own *mum* still didn't know that George could do magic — Dream had told the shorter boy to keep the wizarding world a secret until he received his Hogwarts letter. *She's just a No-Maj, George*, Dream had said. *She won't understand until one of the Hogwarts staff comes to explain it to her.*

"I still have to go to school, Dream."

Dream wrinkled his nose up at the statement. "You *hate* your school. You said everyone bullies you all the time."

"It's not so bad once you get used to it. My homeroom teacher is supposed to be really nice this year, so I'll probably be alright."

"You should just skip. Hang out with me in the woods tomorrow instead," Dream suggested, prompting George to shake his head.

"I wish I could, but I have to go to school. I'll still spend time with you every evening, though, okay?"

Dream sighed, but didn't push the matter further. The boys spent the rest of the afternoon chasing each other around in the grass until they were both exhausted and out of breath. They were relaxing underneath the big oak tree in George's backyard when the shorter boy suddenly had the urge to ask Dream a question.

"Hey, Dream?"

"Hmmm?" Dream hummed, tilting his head in George's direction.

"I was just wondering...why did you sound offended when I asked you if you were Muggle-born?"

Dream's eyes, which had been closed, fluttered open at the question. The taller boy's eyebrows furrowed as he seemed to contemplate his answer.

"I wasn't, like, mad or anything," he finally said. "I'm just not Muggle-born. Both of my parents are purebloods."

"Oh," George responded, still wondering. He took a deep breath before asking another question. "Is it...bad, or something? Being Muggle-born?"

"No. It's not anything bad." Dream didn't hesitate with his answer, which immediately put George

at ease.

...Until Dream spoke his next words.

“You’re still a wizard, George. It just means you got unlucky and were born to the wrong parents.”

Dream had closed his eyes again while he was giving his answer, so the taller boy didn’t see the taken aback expression that appeared on George’s face at his words.

“Pardon?” George asked, voice colored with disbelief. “How was I born to the *wrong* parents?”

Registering George’s incredulous tone, Dream sat up and turned to face his friend. Dream looked surprised at George’s reaction to his statement.

“Woah, chill out George, I said it’s *fine* that you’re Muggle-born.”

“Yes, but you also said I was born to the wrong parents. And I *love* my parents.”

“Well...yeah, sure, you don’t *have* to hate them,” Dream furrowed his eyebrows, “But you’re a wizard, and they’re Muggles.”

George bristled at this. “What’s wrong with being a Muggle?”

“*Nothing*, I guess. We’re just different. Our kind don’t really mix with Muggles.”

“You thought *I* was a Muggle when we met.”

At this, Dream paused.

“Yeah,” the blond admitted with a shrug. “I did. But you felt...different.”

“Different how?”

“I don’t know, George! You just weren’t like the Muggles my parents told me about. You were different. And now I know *why* you were different — you were a wizard like me all along!” Dream grinned at this, but for once George didn’t smile back.

Dream looked so *genuine*, so oblivious as to why George seemed hurt by his train of thought, and George didn’t quite know how to explain to him why he was offended.

“Everyone I know except you is a Muggle, you know,” George finally said, not meeting Dream’s gaze. “I guess...it doesn’t feel right to me, the way you act like I can just brush them off now that I’m a wizard.”

Dream’s eyes widened in shock, “I’m not— I’m not *racist* or anything!” he spluttered, waving his hands around as though to dismiss the suggestion. “I don’t hate Muggles! I wanted to be your friend even *before* I knew you had magic, remember?”

George sighed and nodded. “Yeah.”

“So I *can’t* be racist,” Dream declared, seemingly more to convince himself than George.

The boys sat in silence for a few moments, mulling over the conversation before George spoke up once more.

“But...Dream?”

Dream tightened up, though he tried not to show it, “Yeah?”

“If...if you said you have pure blood, what does that make my blood? Do I have...” He hesitated. “Dirty blood?”

Dream whipped his head around and met George’s hesitant gaze with a wide-eyed one. “No! George, your blood is fine,” Dream insisted, though the blond looked hesitant.

“Dream? What aren’t you telling me?”

Dream broke eye contact and fiddled with his hands. After what felt like ages to George, Dream cleared his throat and started to speak.

“I guess I should probably tell you about this before you get your Hogwarts letter, but please don’t be mad,” Dream said quietly, a pleading look on his face.

“I won’t be mad at you, Dream,” George promised.

“Well,” the taller boy said. “There *are* some wizards who think it’s bad to be Muggle-born. My mom said that there was a war over it here before I was born.”

George’s eyes widened. “A war? *Here*?”

“Yes,” Dream answered in a serious tone. “There was this group of crazies who wanted all of the Muggle-borns to go to prison for stealing magic.”

George felt panic seize his throat. “But I didn’t *steal* my magic! I’ve had it since I was little!”

“*Duh*, I know that. It’s impossible to steal magic, but the crazy people thought that you could. There was a big war where lots of witches and wizards died, but the good guys won in the end.”

George calmed down a bit at his friend’s explanation. It was almost impossible for George to imagine a war between magical people — in the *U.K.*, of all places! What did a magical war even look like?

And to think that this war was fought over people whose parents were non-magical. People like *George*.

The thought of powerful wizards trying to hunt him down and arrest him for his magic sent a shiver of fear down George’s spine.

“Anyway, the thing is, there are still a few people who think that Muggle-borns are bad. You’ll probably meet a few of them, but you should just keep in mind that they’re crazy jerks,” Dream assured him.

The shorter boy nodded seriously. It wasn’t hard for him to imagine being bullied for something he couldn’t control; he had been dealing with bullies his entire life.

George looked up at Dream and smiled. “I’m glad that you’re not one of those people,” he said earnestly, bumping his friend’s shoulder with his own. Dream chuckled and bumped him back.

“Yeah.”

A beat of silence.

“George?”

“Yes, Dream?”

“If you ever see my dad...try not to talk to him, okay?”

George’s smile faltered. “Why not?”

Dream sighed and sounded apologetic when he spoke his next words. “My dad’s kinda old-fashioned. *I* don’t care that you’re Muggle-born, but I don’t know how he’d react if he found out that we’re friends.”

George didn’t quite know what to say to his friend’s admission, so he just nodded and hummed. Sensing a new tension in the atmosphere, George decided to lighten the mood.

“Can you tell me how you play quidditch, Dream? Do you *have* to be flying?”

The question achieved its desired effect: George smiled when Dream perked up immediately and started rambling about the point system and the various positions and teams. They talked until George’s mother came outside and insisted that George come in and get ready for bed.

That night, George dreamt of witches and wizards casting spells at each other on a battlefield.

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“George! Your answer to the seventh question, please.”

George glanced down at his notebook and quickly read off the answer. “Seven hundred twenty-one thousand eleven,” he said, earning him a smile from his teacher.

Mrs. Jacobsen turned around to write something on the blackboard, which is when George felt someone kick his chair.

“Aren’t you clever, Georgie?” Simon whispered condescendingly. George didn’t take the bait, instead focusing on completing the next question in the problem set. He’d almost finished answering the multiplication problem when his chair was kicked yet again.

*Ignore him, George. Ignore him and he will go away.*

George finished the problem. Simon kicked his chair again.

The kicking continued until George finally turned around and shot the boy behind him a glare.

“Stop it, you git. I’m trying to work.”

Simon just smirked at George’s request and kicked his chair once more. George could feel his face heating up in annoyance.

The next few seconds were a blur.

It happened so quickly that George didn’t have time to fully process the sudden burst of energy in his chest and the way that his hands warmed up in a very familiar way. Before George even knew what was happening, Simon’s chair began to splinter. The wooden legs suddenly snapped like twigs, sending Simon falling to the floor with a loud *thump*.

The whole class fell silent. All eyes were on Simon, who was sprawled out comically on the floor among the broken pieces of his chair. Laughs erupted once the other students took notice of the large boy's unfortunate predicament, which made Simon's face turn beet red.

Mrs. Jacobsen quickly reined everyone in and a teaching assistant soon found Simon another chair. The class eventually resumed working, and George's chair was spared from further abuse.

When the bell rang, signaling the end of the school day, George hurried out of the classroom and speed-walked down the hallway. He wanted to get home quickly so that he could tell Dream all about his accidental burst of magic. The blond boy would probably pat him on the back and laugh with him at Simon's misfortune; just the memory of his bully sprawled out helplessly on the floor made George smile to himself.

Just as George stepped outside, he heard a voice call his name.

"Hey, George! Come back here, you wanker!"

George didn't even turn around when he heard Simon's shout, ducking his head instead and quickening his pace. There was no way that he was going to have a confrontation with Simon. He wanted to end his school day on a good note.

Much to George's displeasure, he could hear heavy footsteps behind him. Soon, there was a hand on George's shoulder yanking him backwards.

Simon's expression was furious as the larger boy glared at George. "I *know* you messed with my chair, you tosser. What did you do, loosen a few bolts during break time?"

George gulped nervously but stood his ground.

"I didn't touch your stupid chair," the shorter boy said evenly, straightening his back to stand a little taller. Simon's eyes flashed at the denial.

"Liar," he spat. "You made a *bad* decision, Georgie."

With those words, Simon abruptly pushed George away, causing the shorter boy to stumble before regaining his balance and quickly sprinting away in the direction of his house. When he looked back at the school, he saw Simon talking with a few other boys from his year. The sight filled George with unease.

It took about twenty minutes for George to walk home, and he couldn't help but nervously glance over his shoulder at every turn. He'd never heard Simon sound so *ominous* before. It was frightening.

The rest of George's walk was anxious and tense, but the feelings of dread quickly left him as soon as he spotted Dream waiting for him outside his house.

"George!" Dream called out, jogging over to meet him. The other boy held what George now knew to be a quaffle in his hands.

"Hello, Dream!"

"Yeah, yeah, hello. You took forever to get home! I want to practice throwing the quaffle around some more, so hurry up and put your stupid backpack away!"

George grinned and sprinted inside his house to put his school things away in his room. He called



out a hello to his mother, who informed him that they would be having spaghetti for supper and told him not to stay out too late.

The boys passed each other the leather ball until they were both sweaty and tired. George started to tell Dream that he better go inside for supper when the taller boy squinted at something over George's shoulder and frowned.

"Do you know those guys?" Dream asked, pointing to a group of boys approaching in the distance.

When George turned and saw the face of the boy at the front of the group, he gasped and took several steps backwards. Dream shot him a questioning look.

"It's Simon. And some other boys from our school. Dream, I think they're here to murder me," George said to his friend in a panicked tone.

Dream snorted and crossed his arms in front of him, eyeing the approaching figures with a smirk.

"Oh, please. A bunch of No-Maj kids? I'd like to see them try."

George looked at Dream with alarm. "Dream, it's Simon and his friends. They're *awful*. Last year they shoved my head in a school toilet and held me down until I almost fainted. I *really* don't want to deal with this right now."

A look of concern for his friend flashed across Dream's face, quickly replaced by one of steely determination. "Just stay put, George. They won't lay a hand on us."

So George stood still like a deer in the headlights, watching his school tormentors come closer like a gang out of a movie. He knew he probably looked terrified, but he took comfort in the way Dream stood with his head held high beside him.

There were four boys in the group: Simon, a boy from his year called Finlay, another boy in his class called Duncan, and an older boy who George vaguely recognized as Simon's older brother. George could make out wicked smiles on their faces as they grew closer, and the sight made him want to turn around and find somewhere to hide.

When the group came close enough so that they were within hearing range, Dream surprised George by speaking first.

"Hello there," the blond said casually, quirked an eyebrow. "You guys live around here?"

George willed his friend not to antagonize his bullies. After all, it was *George* who would have to face them in school the following day.

Simon glanced at his brother before replying. "Who're you? A friend of *Georgie-poo's*?" The nickname made the other boys in Simon's group snort and eye George with disdain. George could see Dream tense out of the corner of his eye.

"I am. You aren't, though. So what are a bunch of losers like you doing in our neighborhood?"

Simon's evil smirk quickly vanished and was replaced by an angry frown.

"You're quite the twat, aren't you? I'm not surprised Georgie's friends are all twits like him."

George didn't want to be confrontational, but he also didn't want to look weak in front of Dream. "Oh, you're such a prat, Simon. I didn't even *touch* your chair, if that's what you're here to talk

about, so you and your friends can sod off,” George announced in the bravest voice he could muster.

One of the boys — Finlay — cracked his knuckles in an obvious attempt to look intimidating. George tried not to flinch at the sound.

“You think you’re so clever, don’t you, Davidson? I *know* you broke my chair. You didn’t even look surprised when I fell out of it,” Simon seethed. Before George could even respond, Dream let out a wheeze.

“Oh, please,” he got out once he was done laughing. “With your fat butt sitting in it, I’m surprised that chair didn’t break sooner.”

George would have laughed if it wasn’t for the look of utter fury that graced Simon’s face at the remark.

Simon’s older brother cleared his throat and stepped forward. “I don’t let anyone speak to my brother that way,” he said menacingly. “Looks like we ought to teach these two a lesson, don’t we, boys?”

Dream smirked at the threatening comment and shook his head. “You? Teach *us* something? I’m losing brain cells just by standing this close to you dimwits,” he retorted.

There were a few tense moments where the four bullies just glared at Dream and George; it was the calm before the storm. Then, Dream smiled, and Simon lunged at him.

George gasped as the large boy swung a fist at his best friend’s face. Dream dodged the blow effortlessly, twisting Simon’s arm behind his back and kicking him to the ground as if it were second nature. Duncan, seeing Simon on the ground, leapt forward and aimed a punch at Dream’s stomach, only for Dream to sidestep the attempt and push his attacker into a nearby tree.

George was stunned by what he was seeing. Dream, his best friend, was fighting his school tormentors as if they were nothing.

Unfortunately for George, the fact that he was distracted by Dream’s fight gave Finlay the perfect opportunity to shove him to the ground. George gasped and hurriedly tried to get back up, only to receive a kick in the side from Simon’s older brother.

A sharp pain rocketed throughout George’s body, causing him to cry out. As fear overtook his brain, he registered the tell-tale tingling sensation of his magic preparing to come to his rescue.

“What’s wrong, *Georgie*? Cat got your tongue?” Finlay jeered, preparing to aim a punch at George’s face. George closed his eyes and surrendered himself to the growing warm feeling in his chest, willing his magic to do its job.

Half a second later, George felt a burst of energy and opened his eyes to see that he was now perched high above the scene, sitting up in a tree branch out of harm’s way.

Beneath him, Finlay gaped at the ground, opening and closing his mouth like a fish out of water. “*Bloody hell!*” he exclaimed, staring at the space that George no longer occupied with utter confusion. “How did...where in god’s name...George?” he stammered, swiveling his head back and forth in search of his vanished target. Simon’s older brother was similarly flabbergasted.

“Where did that little wanker *go*?” the older boy shouted, scanning the scene frantically. After several moments, he glanced upwards, eyes widening when he registered George perched up above

him. Just as Finlay made to step towards the tree, Dream appeared behind him and shoved him to the ground.

“Don’t you *dare* lay your filthy No-Maj hands on him,” Dream said threateningly before flicking his wrist and causing the branch of one of the other nearby trees to swing back and smack Finlay across the face. Finlay clutched his now bleeding nose, groaning in pain. Dream met George’s wide brown eyes and gave him a concerned look.

*Are you okay?* Dream mouthed. George nodded in response.

When the other boys in Simon’s gang had come to their senses, they looked absolutely terrified.

“George, you little *twit!* Go on and stay in that tree like the coward you are,” Simon shouted up at George angrily. Beside Simon, Finlay had a look of panic on his face.

“You absolute *freak*,” he said, horrified. “How the hell did you pull that trick off? You’re not even bloody *human*,” Finlay spat, blood still pouring from his nose.

“What a bunch of losers. You guys are pathetic,” Dream proclaimed, wrinkling his nose at the four bullies and kicking a pebble in their direction.

“This isn’t over. See you in school, Georgie,” Simon called out over his shoulder as he and his gang began to leave. Several glares were tossed at George and Dream as the bullies disappeared into the forest.

Only when George was positive that the other boys were far away did he finally climb down from his perch. Dream was waiting for him on the ground with a smirk on his freckled face.

“I told you we’d be fine,” he said smugly, eyes shining with something akin to pride. George couldn’t help but laugh at the absurdity of the situation. He and Dream had faced *four* bullies from school and had come out alive. The mere thought of it seemed ridiculous, yet George was still breathing.

“How did you do that thing with the tree?” George asked, voice colored with awe.

Dream shrugged and glanced down at his hands. “I don’t really know. I just felt the magic in my hands, and the tree branch was right *there*, and I just kinda...asked it to move? With my thoughts?”

“Please hit that boy in the face, Mr. Tree Branch, it would be *really* helpful,” George chimed in his best Dream impression, forcing an American accent.

“Shut up, you idiot,” Dream muttered, blushing. “It was cooler than *your* magic. All you did was apparate into a tree.”

“Hey! I think any magic is cool.”

“You’re right,” Dream conceded. “Everything about that was *super* cool.”

“I can’t *believe* you said that thing about his ‘fat butt!’ That was *brilliant!*”

“And *I* can’t believe that my own son would be so stupid as to waste his time antagonizing *Muggles*,” a deep voice sounded from behind them.

The boys whirled around, coming face to face with a tall blond man dressed in an intimidating dark blue robe. The man, like Dream, had a piercing green gaze which he aimed at George’s best

friend.

“D-dad?” Dream stammered nervously, glancing at George briefly before returning his gaze to the man before them.

“Clay. That was incredibly foolish of you. Though I am thrilled that your magic is manifesting itself more and more each day, what I just witnessed here was idiotic. I had to oblivate all four of those Muggle boys thanks to your *stupidity*, ” Dream’s father said in a voice that made George shiver. “You will return home at once.”

Dream — *Clay*? — obediently shuffled to his father’s side while George watched, frozen. When there were several meters of distance between Dream and George, Dream’s father’s gaze turned to the shorter boy.

“George, was it?” the man asked coolly. George nodded wordlessly, and the man continued. “You must be the mystery friend taking up all of Clay’s free time, though my son neglected to mention your...*heritage*.”

With those words, Dream’s father turned on his heel and took several long strides in the direction of his house. Just before the two figures disappeared into the tree line, the man turned back and tossed a few more words over his shoulder.

“Congratulations on your newfound magic, Muggle-born. Use it wisely.”

And just like that, George was alone in the forest.

~~~~~

George did not see Dream again for almost an entire month.

October passed agonizingly slowly without his best friend to keep him company. George was lonelier than ever — word had spread throughout school about his confrontation with Simon’s gang, and the other children were avoiding George like the plague. Pretty soon it was Halloween, but George couldn’t find it in him to even *think* about putting on a costume and attempting to celebrate.

George knew that Dream’s father was keeping him inside. There was no other explanation for his friend’s disappearance. Dream had warned him that his father was “old-fashioned” when it came to Muggle-borns, but seeing the way the older wizard had eyed George with disdain still stung immensely.

George cursed his own stupidity. If he had just hidden in the woods and avoided Simon, Dream would have never confronted the gang in the first place. Dream might have still been allowed to come outside and play.

Dream might have been able to celebrate George’s birthday with him on the first day of November.

George sighed and blinked back tears. It wouldn’t be his first lonely birthday. His mum would still make him a cake, at least.

It was with a heavy heart that George went to bed early on the last day of October. He dreamed of stormy skies.

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On his birthday, George's mum woke him up with a song and his favorite pancakes for breakfast. George could barely even say thank you without crying.

At school, no one remembered that it was George's special day, but he didn't remind them. There was only one person who could cheer him up, but that person was hidden away in a magical house under the watch of his evil wizard dad.

George was so absorbed in his own self-pity on his walk home from school that he didn't even notice Dream sitting on his front doorstep until the taller boy was literally in front of his nose.

"Happy birthday, George!"

George's head snapped up immediately as he registered Dream's presence.

"Dream!" he exclaimed joyfully, throwing his arms around his best friend. Dream laughed and returned the hug. When the boys parted, George couldn't help but laugh at the sight of his best friend wearing a silly cardboard party hat.

"You were gone for *so long*! How are you here?" George asked in amazement.

Dream shrugged and looked at his feet. "Dad sucks. But I explained everything to Mom, and she finally convinced him to let me back outside."

"I can't believe you remembered my birthday," George said warmly, glancing down at the small box wrapped in brown paper that Dream held in his hands. The blond scoffed at the statement.

"Of *course* I remembered! You're my best friend! There was no *way* I was staying grounded for your birthday. I would have snuck out the window if I had to," the taller boy declared before shoving the small package into George's hands. "Now open it!"

George chuckled and began prying apart the wrapping paper carefully, which made Dream impatiently groan.

"Just tear it open already!"

"No."

"Come *on*, George. You're taking forever."

"Just wait, Dream. I've almost got it."

With a final tug, the wrapping paper came completely off, revealing a small cardboard box with the words "for Gogi" scrawled messily on the lid. George rolled his eyes at the silly nickname and gave Dream a withering look.

"*Gogi*? Really?"

“Just open it!”

So George opened the box, then gasped as what looked like a brown frog hopped out the second he lifted the lid.

Dream reached out and caught the thing before explaining his gift excitedly. “I wanted to get you something magical, since you got me a No-Maj toy for *my* birthday. So I got you all the best wizard candy! You have to be careful with the chocolate frogs, otherwise they can get away from you,” the taller boy said as he handed George the frog back.

George was silent as he read the labels of some of the items in the box. *Chocolate Frogs. Pepper Imps. Fizzing Whizzbees*. He couldn’t even begin to guess at what some of the sweets were, but excitement overcame him at the thought of consuming anything magical.

“Do you, uh...” Dream asked hesitantly, “do you like my present?”

“I love it,” George answered earnestly.

Dream grinned before glancing back down at the box, “...are you going to eat the chocolate frog?”

In response, George took a huge bite of the squirming chocolate creature, humming delightedly when the delicious chocolate melted on his tongue. He spent the rest of his eleventh birthday sampling the best sweets he’d ever tasted with the best friend he’d ever had. Everything was perfect.

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George found that time passed quicker when he had things to look forward to.

Dream was a godsend. Whenever George was having a bad day at school, all he needed to do was remember that his best friend was waiting for him when he got home and he instantly felt better. George didn’t know how he got through the day before he met Dream; whenever the other boy couldn’t come out to play for whatever reason, George didn’t know what to do with himself.

Dream always left him in a good mood. It was like — well, it was like magic.

Soon enough, the school year had come and gone. Breezy autumn turned to ice-cold winter. Winter melted into spring. Spring eventually gave way to summer, and pretty soon George was getting ready for his last day of Year Six.

“You mean after tomorrow you won’t be gone all day?” Dream asked excitedly. George nodded, smiling at the other boy’s enthusiasm.

“I’ll be done with school until September.”

“And then school will be *fun*, George, because you and I will go to Hogwarts together!”

George smiled at the thought of him and Dream going on magical adventures together in Scotland. He only hoped that he would actually get to go; he hadn’t heard any word from the prestigious magic school Dream had told him so much about. But George tried not to worry about it too much — Dream was confident that he would be getting a letter, and George trusted his best friend.

“I can’t *wait* until I get my letter. I’ll finally get to leave home and be away from Dad and Drista,” Dream groaned.

George snorted. “Drista’s only three years old, though. Why do you want to get away from her?” he asked his friend.

“Because she’s *so annoying!* Mom always makes me share my LEGOs with her, and she *chews* on them, George. It’s disgusting.”

George laughed at Dream’s complaint. Though he had never seen his best friend’s little sister, he could picture her clearly in his mind: a little blonde girl with freckles and big green eyes, the spitting image of her brother. He liked hearing about the chaos that the three-year-old caused in Dream’s home. She sounded fun.

A question occurred to George, then. “Hey Dream?”

“What?”

“Your dad called you Clay. That’s your real name, right?”

Dream grimaced, but nodded. “Yeah. I don’t like it, though.”

“Why not?”

“It’s my dad’s name, too. Technically, I’m *Clay Ellsworth Aurelius Selwyn the Third*. But Dream suits me better, I think.”

George laughed at the ridiculously long title. “Yes, I like Dream. Is your sister’s name also very long and strange?”

Dream snorted. “Yep. Hers is *Drista Lucilia Florence Selwyn* . Our names are pretty ridiculous.”

George chuckled in agreement. “George Henry Davidson sounds pretty boring in comparison.”

“You know what sounds better than George?”

“Don’t you dare—”

“*Gogi.*”

“*Don’t call me that!*”

~~~~~

The eighteenth day of June began as any other ordinary day. George and Dream met up that morning in the woods behind their houses, Dream carrying a quaffle in his hands. Free from the demands of the local school, George was able to spend all day playing with his best friend, which is exactly what he did. The boys took turns aiming the leather ball at different trees, pretending to be chasers on their very own two-person quidditch team. Time flew as it always did when they were having fun; pretty soon it was close to one in the afternoon.

George cheered as Dream executed a particularly impressive quaffle throw, then checked his watch

and sighed.

“Mum wants me to come in for lunch in a few minutes, so we’ll have to take a break.”

Dream rolled his eyes. “You’re always so *hungry*, George. For someone so tiny, you sure do eat a lot.”

George gave Dream a shove in response. “I’m not *tiny*, you idiot. You’re just freakishly tall!”

“Whatever you say, tiny.”

Dream looked like he was going to say something else but suddenly became distracted by something above George’s head. When George turned around to see what had caught his friend’s eye, he spotted a freakishly large bird with dark gray feathers flying towards them, holding what looked like a rolled up piece of paper in its talons.

As if in slow motion, the bird — an owl, George realized — swooped down and perched itself atop a tree stump next to Dream. Bewildered, George turned to Dream with a questioning look.

Dream didn’t look quite as confused as George did, which probably meant this was something magic-related.

“Why’s the bird here?” George asked, eyeing the owl curiously.

“Mail. Let me see who it’s for,” Dream responded, reaching out and grabbing the piece of paper. The taller boy unrolled it and began to read its contents out loud.

“Dear Mr. Selwyn,” Dream began. “We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted...” Dream’s green eyes widened and he gasped, scanning the rest of the letter hurriedly. George suddenly felt jittery.

“Dream? What does it say?”

Dream was silent for several more moments. George coughed, about to repeat his question, when his friend looked up at him with the widest smile on his freckled face.

“George! I’m going to Hogwarts!” he announced in a voice ringing with pure delight. George’s mouth fell open at the declaration.

“*That’s* your Hogwarts letter?” the shorter boy asked, astonished.

“Yes! I can’t believe it!” Dream began to prance around the tree stump excitedly, looking happier than a young child on Christmas Day.

“Congratulations, Dream!” George said warmly, suddenly overcome with happiness for his best friend. The two boys danced around each other for a few more minutes before Dream abruptly stopped and turned to the gray owl.

“Hey, Owl,” he addressed the bird. “Do you have another letter for George? He’s a wizard, too.”

George was just about to say something when a voice sounded behind them.

“Well, Mr. Selwyn, Mr. Davidson’s letter is being delivered in person.”

The boys snapped their heads around to face the mysterious voice, which turned out to belong to the shortest man George had ever seen. Dressed in light blue robes and a matching pointed hat, the



top of the wizard's head looked to George like it would barely reach his shoulder.

Dream looked surprised at the wizard's sudden appearance, but quickly crossed his arms, "Who are *you*?" he demanded.

"Ah, yes, allow me to introduce myself. I am Professor Filius Flitwick, Charms Master and Head of Ravenclaw House at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry," the man proclaimed cheerfully. George's eyes widened when the wizard then turned and spoke directly to *him*.

"On this occasion, Mr. Davidson, Headmistress McGonagall has appointed me as your special messenger."

"Oh!" Dream gasped. "You came in person 'cuz he's No-Maj-born!"

"Indeed, Mr. Selwyn. It's school policy to send messengers to Muggle-born households when delivering acceptance letters. Now, Mr. Davidson," he addressed George. "Would you care to show me where you live? I believe we have quite a bit of explaining to do this evening."

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His parents took the news remarkably well.

Of course, they were both highly skeptical. Anyone would be skeptical of a man who introduced himself as a wizard teacher at a magic school. But Professor Flitwick was patient in his explanations, going so far as to demonstrate several spells to his parents to prove his magical identity. George particularly enjoyed when the man made the coasters on their coffee table perform a little dance with a flick of his wand.

"You're saying that *our* Georgie is...magical?" his mum had asked, awe-struck.

"Yes he is, Mrs. Davidson. He has quite a lot of magic, too, from what I've read in his file," the wizard supplied. "The Ministry of Magic tracks all instances of underage magic, and quite a few instances have been traced to this very household."

George's parents went silent at that, and both turned to look at their son. George could see pride and wonder reflected in their facial expressions, and the knowledge that his parents were *pleased* by his abilities made his heart swell.

"Now, if you'll excuse me," said Professor Flitwick as he stood up from his chair, "I must be going home. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to send an owl to the castle. I very much look forward to seeing you in September, George."

"Thank you, Professor," George murmured, a blush coloring his cheeks.

"Who knows," Flitwick added as he adjusted his spectacles, "I may even have the pleasure of being your Head of House!"

With those words, the man disappeared with a loud pop, leaving George alone with his parents and a list of required school supplies.

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The rest of the summer passed in a blur. For Dream's eleventh birthday, George purchased him a football with his pocket money. Dream loved the present and insisted that George teach him more about his "No-Maj sports." As August came to a close, the boys' excitement at the prospect of *finally* going off to Hogwarts mounted.

Everything became *real* to George when he and his parents had visited Diagon Alley in the center of London to purchase school supplies. There had been so many magical people wearing a wide array of beautiful robes; the sight prompted George to immediately try on his own school robes the second he returned home. Dream had made fun of him, but he knew that his best friend was just as excited to go off to school.

"My mom gave me a book about Hogwarts for my birthday," Dream told George one afternoon. "I read all about the four Hogwarts Houses. I know my dad was in Slytherin, which kind of makes me want to be in whatever House is the *least* like that one."

"What's the difference between the Houses?" George inquired. Dream's eyes went wide as he began to recall his knowledge excitedly.

"Well, Slytherins are supposed to be cunning and ambitious, which I guess is why Dad was in that one. Then there's Gryffindor, where all of the chivalrous and brave people go. The guy who delivered your letter was Head of Ravenclaw, which is where all the nerds are—"

"Sorry, *what*? Where all the *nerds* are? Come off it, what did the book actually say?"

"Ugh, *fine*. It said cleverness and creativity, which basically just makes it a nerd house. And then there's Hufflepuff, who are the dependable, kindhearted ones."

George went quiet, contemplating the information. He decided that all of the options sounded fine; truthfully, he knew he would be thrilled no matter which House he was sorted into just because all of the Houses were magical.

"I like Gryffindor. I hope I end up there," Dream declared. "I think it would really make my dad mad."

George shook his head, smiling at his friend's logic. They were mere weeks away from embarking on a seven-year-long magical adventure, and Dream's top priority was annoying his dad. It was just so *Dream*.

"I can't wait until September," George said wistfully.

"Me neither, Georgie. Me neither."

## Chapter End Notes

I don't know when I'll have time to finish the third chapter, but I'd appreciate it if in the mean time you peeps could help me by filling out this survey about Houses:  
<https://forms.gle/vVrRGdxio21vnKRK9>

Comments are very much appreciated <3

## Chapter Three || Year One

### Chapter Summary

Dream and George are off to Hogwarts!

### Chapter Notes

...THE GOOGLE FORM SORTING HAT HAS SPOKEN! Thank you for the 55 responses. I only overrode one of the survey questions because one respondent pointed out that Fundy's House was actually confirmed on stream (thanks for that, btw!). If you don't see someone mentioned, do not worry! There was no way that I was going to have all of these people in the same year because 1) I like some of the age dynamics, especially when it comes to Tommy & Tubbo, and 2) it would make this story very messy. All in due time, my friends!

Also: this chapter contains a few passages lifted straight from two different Harry Potter books. I will include references in the end notes :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Drista looked exactly like George thought she would.

George watched from across the train platform as Dream bade farewell to his family. The three-year-old blonde girl was clinging to his leg while he was trying to shake her off; the sight made George smile to himself. The pair of siblings were, in a word, adorable.

Dream's mother seemed nice enough. She had even waved to George when Dream pointed him out to her in the crowd. Dream's father, on the other hand...

Well. Needless to say, George did not receive a wave from Dream's dad.

George's own parents had just left King's Cross. Platform nine and three-quarters had been quite the surprise to his entire family. George and his parents had unknowingly gone right past the entrance to the Hogwarts Express many times over the years on their trips in and out of London, never once suspecting that there was a magic train just on the other side of the barrier.

Magic really was mind-boggling.

George's trolley was piled high with various trunks and books and school supplies which his parents had lovingly purchased for him a few weeks earlier. In his pocket was his very own wand — unicorn hair and beech wood, the wizard behind the counter at Ollivander's had informed him. It had taken George six tries (and several small explosions) before his wand had finally chosen him. The feeling of the magical instrument in his hand was thrilling.

He glanced once again at his best friend, only to see Dream being spoken to by his father. George didn't like the stern expression on the older pureblood's face one bit.

The Hogwarts Express gave a loud whistle, signaling that it was almost time for departure. After what felt like forever, Dream's family finally turned and exited the platform, leaving their son alone at last. Dream immediately caught George's eye in the crowd and pushed his own trolley towards the train.

"George!" the blond boy greeted his friend with a smile. "This is *awesome*! Quick, let's get on and find a place to put our stuff."

So the friends boarded the Hogwarts Express together, squeezing past several other boys and girls of various ages. George followed Dream's lead as the taller boy found an empty compartment a little ways down the aisle. George gratefully took one of the seats closest to the window and set his trunk down at his feet. Dream sat down directly across from him.

"I can't believe this is really happening," George murmured, eyes fixated on the busy train platform outside the window.

"*I* can. I've been waiting for this my whole life."

"*Okay*, Mr. Magic Boy, we get it. You're destined to be a great wizard."

"Heck yeah I am. And you're also a magic boy, so shut up."

Just then, there was a knock at the door to their compartment. A boy with curly brown hair peeked his head in and glanced at Dream and George curiously.

"Uh, hello. There aren't any empty compartments left, so...do you mind if my friends and I come in?"

"Not at all," Dream said with a friendly smile. The boy thanked him and slid the compartment door all the way open, allowing two more boys to enter. George glanced at the newcomers curiously. They all looked to be his age, but he asked them just to make sure.

"Are you all first-years?" he inquired. The other boys all nodded.

"Yes we are. And judging by the fact that you two aren't wearing any House colors, I'm assuming you are as well?" the curly-haired boy asked in reply.

Dream nodded and decided to introduce himself. "I'm Dream," he said, extending a hand towards the other boy good-naturedly.

"That's an odd name. I'm Wilbur Soot. Pleased to meet you."

The other two new boys introduced themselves as Alastair Eretson and Jebediah Schlatt. George thought it was odd that everyone except him and Dream seemed to introduce themselves with their first *and* last names, but he chalked it up to yet another odd part of wizarding culture he had yet to understand.

"Am I supposed to call everyone by their last names, or..." George asked hesitantly, unsure of what the common practice was.

"Just call me Eret. It's what everyone does," the boy named Eret supplied helpfully.

"I prefer Schlatt. It's *much* easier than Jebediah," Schlatt said with a smirk.

"As for me, Wilbur's fine," said Wilbur.

“Alright then,” George said with a note of relief. “Wilbur, Eret, and Schlatt. Nice to meet you all. I’m George.”

The ride to Hogwarts was long but entertaining. George found himself taking a liking to the new boys. He quickly learned that he was the only Muggle-born in the group, which made him a bit self-conscious, but George soon realized that his blood status didn’t matter in the least to his future classmates. In fact, Schlatt asked him several questions about Muggle life which George answered happily.

When the conversation in the compartment died down, Eret pulled out a deck of cards and suggested they play a few card games as the deck shuffled itself in mid-air. Dream reached over to close his gaping jaw with a snicker.

They debated over which game to play before deciding that some bizarre magical version of poker, involving lots of card levitation, would be the easiest to teach George. He still ended up losing every hand.

Eventually, the sun outside the window began to set. Wilbur and Schlatt were now playing some other complicated magic card game while Eret spectated. Across from George, Dream yawned.

“We’re probably in Scotland by now,” the blond said quietly, nudging George’s leg with his foot.

“We better be. We’ve been on this train for hours,” George grumbled in response.

Dream smiled and pulled two objects wrapped in brightly-colored plastic out of his satchel. He extended one to George, who accepted it curiously.

“What’s this?” he asked, as Dream tore open the wrapper on his to reveal a brown pastry with some sort of jelly in the middle.

“It’s a cauldron cake,” the freckled boy said before taking a large bite out of the confection. George glanced down at his own wrapped pastry, noticing the words *Qizilbash Quality Confectionary* printed on the front. Tentatively, George unwrapped his own cake and took a bite.

It wasn’t bad, George decided. Certainly not the best cake he’d ever had, but the jelly in the center bubbled pleasantly in his mouth with every bite.

George was just about to ask Dream what flavor the cake was when Wilbur suddenly pointed at something out the window.

“Look, lads! I think that’s the castle!”

All five eleven-year-olds gathered close to the window at his words. Indeed, if he squinted, George could make out the faint outline of a castle shrouded in mist in the distance. As the train chugged onwards, the boys’ excitement mounted.

“My mum said that there’s a welcoming feast at the start of term,” Eret told the other boys. “I hope they have pumpkin pasties.”

“You’re thinking about the *food*, Eret?” Wilbur asked with an eye roll. “I would think you’d be more excited about what House you’ll be sorted into. That’s what I can’t stop thinking about.”

“I can’t help that I’m starving,” Eret huffed

“My ma was in Hufflepuff,” Schlatt said. “Dad was in Ravenclaw. I wonder which one I’ll be

in...”

“My parents were both in Gryffindor, so I hope that’s where I’ll be headed,” Eret chimed in. “What about you, George? Since your parents are Muggles, you probably don’t have a preference, right?”

George tilted his head and contemplated his answer. “I think I’d be happy anywhere,” he said after a few moments. “But blue is my favorite color, so Ravenclaw might be nice.”

Dream snorted and poked George’s shoulder. “*Nerd*,” he teased, earning an eye roll from George.

After what felt like ages, the train finally pulled into a dimly-lit railway station. A sign hanging above the platform read *Welcome to Hogsmeade!* and George could see several waiting figures in long robes and pointed hats waiting to greet the students.

A knock sounded on their compartment door. A second later, an older-looking blond boy wearing robes lined with blue stepped into their little room.

“Hello, first-years! My name is Phil and I’m one of twenty-four prefects at Hogwarts,” the boy introduced himself, pointing to a bright blue badge pinned to the front of his robes. “Leave your belongings on the train and proceed to the exit in an orderly fashion, please. First-years will cross the Black Lake by boat with Professor Hagrid — he’s quite tall, so you’ll know him when you see him. Welcome to Hogwarts!”

With that, Phil exited the compartment and proceeded to give the same speech to the students in the next section of the train.

The five boys obediently made their way down the corridor and towards the exit. George stayed close to Dream as their little group scanned the platform for the so-called Professor Hagrid. Phil hadn’t been joking when he said the man was tall — the boys found the three-and-a-half meter Professor easily in the crowd. After about five minutes of waiting by the lake, the first-years were instructed to board the boats in groups of four.

“You three go on ahead,” Dream quickly told Wilbur, Eret, and Schlatt when he realized there would be one person left out of the group. “George and I will take a different boat.”

George smiled, thankful that he had Dream for a best friend.

Dream and George found a boat that was already occupied by two other students, and they carefully climbed inside. Their two other boat-mates were a boy with messy light brown hair and a girl with long, dark hair and an aloof look on her face. George waved to both of them, receiving a cheerful wave in return from the boy and nothing more than a sideways glance from the girl.

*Well, that’s rude*, George thought to himself about the girl. *Perhaps she’s just shy*.

“Any more first-years? No? Right then – FORWARD!” Hagrid commanded, causing the little fleet of boats to begin moving on cue.

The sight that awaited them as the boats carried them around a bend left George speechless. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers. Everyone was silent, staring up at the great castle towering overhead as they sailed ever nearer to the cliff on which it stood.

"Heads down!" yelled Hagrid as the first boats reached the cliff; they all bent their heads as the little boats carried them through a curtain of ivy which hid a wide opening in the cliff face. They were carried along a dark tunnel, which seemed to be taking them right underneath the castle, until

they reached a kind of under-ground harbor, where they clambered out onto the rocks.

Once everyone was out of their boats, the students clambered up a passageway in the rock after Hagrid's lamp, coming out at last onto smooth, damp grass right in the shadow of the castle. George followed Dream as the group walked up a flight of stone steps and crowded around a huge, oak front door.

"Everyone here?" Hagrid asked loudly. Seemingly satisfied that no students were left behind, he raised a gigantic fist and knocked three times on the castle door.

The door opened immediately. A tall witch with graying hair stood there, her expression stern as she took in the sight of the children.

"The first years, Headmistress McGonagall," said Hagrid.

"Thank you, Hagrid. I will take them from here."

George followed the crowd of eleven-year-olds into an entrance hall so big his entire house could have fit in it. The stone walls of the hall were lit with flaming torches and the ceiling was so high that George couldn't even see where it ended. The group of wide-eyed children were escorted into a small, empty chamber off the hall. They crowded in, standing rather closer together than they would usually have done, peering about nervously.

"Welcome to Hogwarts," the Headmistress said. "The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your houses. The Sorting is a very important ceremony because, while you are here, your house will be something like your family within Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your house, sleep in your house dormitory, and spend free time in your house common room.

"The four houses are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Each house has its own noble history and each has produced outstanding witches and wizards. While you are at Hogwarts, your triumphs will earn you house points, while any rule-breaking will lose house points. At the end of the year, the house with the most points is awarded the house cup, a great honor. I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever house becomes yours.

"The Sorting Ceremony will take place in a few minutes in front of the rest of the school. I suggest you all smarten yourselves up as much as you can while you are waiting. Professor Hagrid will return when we are ready for you. Please wait quietly."

Murmurs broke out among the students while they waited for Hagrid to come fetch them. George was suddenly very nervous — how would they be sorted? Would there be a test given to them in front of the whole school? What if he embarrassed himself in front of everyone?

A nudge from Dream snapped him out of his anxious thoughts.

"You look like you're thinking too hard," the taller boy whispered in George's ear, sending a shiver down his spine.

"I probably am," George admitted, shrugging helplessly. "I'm scared I'll make a fool of myself in front of the whole school."

Dream smiled at this. "Don't worry," he murmured. "I really don't think the Sorting Ceremony will be too bad. And even if you *do* embarrass yourself in front of everybody, I'll still be your friend."



George chuckled at his friend's words, shaking his head to himself. He really *was* lucky to have Dream.

Suddenly, what looked like a ghost phased through the wall in front of George, sending a wave of shrill screams from the crowd of first-years and making George cling to Dream's arm in fear.

"First-years? How wonderful!" the pearly-white and transparent man exclaimed, ignoring the panicked students, "Are you all waiting to be sorted?"

The boy who had shared a boat with Dream and George began giggling nervously, as several others nodded mutely.

"How exciting! I'm the Fat Friar. I hope to see some of you in Hufflepuff. It's the best House there ever was!"

With those words, the specter vanished into thin air, allowing the first-years to finally calm down.

Before George could fully process the fact that the castle was apparently *haunted*, Professor Hagrid was opening the door to their little room and instructing them to form a line. George did as he was told and fell in line with Dream behind him. The group filed out of the chamber, back across the hall, and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall.

George had never seen anything so splendid. The hall was lit by thousands and thousands of candles that were floating in midair above four long tables, where the rest of the students were sitting. These tables were set with glittering golden plates and goblets. At the top of the hall was another long table where the teachers were sitting.

Professor Hagrid led the first years up there, so that they came to a halt in a line facing the other students, with the teachers behind them. The hundreds of faces staring at them looked like pale lanterns in the flickering candlelight. Dotted here and there among the students, the ghosts shone misty silver. Mainly to avoid all the staring eyes, George looked upward and saw a velvety black ceiling dotted with stars.

"It looks just like the sky outside!" he heard Dream whisper.

It was hard to believe there was a ceiling there at all, and that the Great Hall didn't simply open on to the heavens.

A four-legged stool was placed in front of the first-years. On top of the stool was a pointed wizard's hat, a lot like the ones that most of the magical people George had seen wore. The hat looked extremely filthy, as if it hadn't been washed for a century.

Suddenly, a rip near the brim opened wide like a mouth. The hat began to sing.

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,

But don't judge on what you see,

I'll eat myself if you can find

A smarter hat than me.

You can keep your bowlers black,

Your top hats sleek and tall,  
For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat  
And I can cap them all.  
There's nothing hidden in your head  
The Sorting Hat can't see,  
So try me on and I will tell you  
Where you ought to be.  
You might belong in Gryffindor,  
Where dwell the brave at heart,  
Their daring, nerve, and chivalry Set Gryffindors apart;  
You might belong in Hufflepuff,  
Where they are just and loyal,  
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true and unafraid of toil;  
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,  
if you've a ready mind,  
Where those of wit and learning,  
Will always find their kind;  
Or perhaps in Slytherin  
You'll make your real friends,  
Those cunning folk use any means  
To achieve their ends.  
So put me on! Don't be afraid!  
And don't get in a flap!  
You're in safe hands (though I have none)  
For I'm a Thinking Cap!"

The entire student body applauded once the song was finished. George felt a sense of relief when he realized he wouldn't have to pass any sort of test to get into a House, but the thought of putting that dirty old cap on his head didn't particularly appeal to him.

Did wizards get lice?

"When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be sorted," Headmistress McGonagall said. "Ackerman, Abigail!"

The whole school waited with bated breath as a short girl with curly red hair stepped forward and reached for the hat. It was on her head for approximately five seconds before the hat made its decision.

"GRYFFINDOR!"

The Gryffindor table erupted in excited shouts and congratulatory cheers. Abigail looked immensely pleased with the decision as she pranced over to take a seat next to her new Housemates.

Next was a boy by the name of *Baratashvili, Giorgi*. He was quickly declared a Hufflepuff, much to his excitement. When *Cook, Talia* was called, George knew that his own name would likely be called out next.

Talia also went to Hufflepuff, and then —

"Davidson, George."

George's legs felt like they were made of lead as he walked up to the stool. Trying not to look like he was about to pass out, he quickly put the old hat on his head.

"Hello there, George," a voice said in his ear. "Don't be nervous, now. Let's see...no, Slytherin won't do. Perhaps you'd feel at home in Hufflepuff? Yes, you *do* possess quite the moral compass...and such a fierce sense of loyalty!"

*Will I be in Hufflepuff, then?* George thought.

"Maybe. Although, I *could* place you in Gryffindor, what with your chivalry...though I think they're a bit too brazen for you, George. That leaves...ah, yes. I see it now. Your heart is sound, but your passionate curiosity is what *really* drives you. Your new House will foster that thirst for knowledge and help you realize your dreams. You belong in RAVENCLAW!"

The hat was suddenly lifted from George's head. His eyes snapped to the Ravenclaw table, where countless smiling faces were clapping for him and cheering his name. To George's colorblind eyes, the sight was magnificent — the table was adorned with decorations that were all a bold, breathtaking *blue*.

The prefect who he'd briefly met earlier — Phil — patted him on the back when he'd sat down. "Welcome to the best House in the castle!" he said to George warmly.

A girl named *Davis, Daviana* was sent to Slytherin, and pretty soon a name that George recognized was called out.

"Eretson, Alastair!"

Eret walked up to the hat eagerly. Almost an entire minute passed before the hat spoke.

“RAVENCLAW!” it declared, much to George’s delight.

Eret made his way to their table and sat next to George with a grin. “Alright, George?” he asked with shining eyes.

“Better than ever!” George replied enthusiastically.

The Sorting Ceremony continued. The boy who George recognized from his boat was next, and after several moments, *Jacobs, Karl* became a Hufflepuff.

Several more students were sorted before George saw another familiar face approach the hat. “Minx, Justine,” the Headmistress read out, prompting the grumpy-looking girl who had also been on George’s boat to walk forward.

Three seconds was all the time that the Sorting Hat needed. “SLYTHERIN!” it announced, and the Minx girl strutted over to the corresponding table. Unlike the other first-years, she showed no signs of excitement on her face.

George barely paid attention to the students who came next. A few more Ravenclaws joined his table, but all George could think about was Dream. He saw his best friend standing next to Wilbur and Schlatt as all three boys waited for their surnames to be called.

*Robinson, Adele* joined the Ravenclaw table. George barely even glanced at her, too absorbed in his thoughts about Dream.

“Schlatt, Jebediah.”

Schlatt eagerly pulled the hat over his eyes, only to take it back off seconds later after he was declared a Slytherin.

Finally, the name George had been waiting for was called.

“Selwyn, Clay.”

The entire hall went quiet. Beside George, Eret tensed.

“He lied about his name?” Eret asked George quietly. George stiffened and shook his head.

“He didn’t *lie*. All of his friends call him Dream.”

Eret snorted. “That’s a lie to me, George. I get it though, what with *that* surname.”

George shot his Housemate a questioning look. All around them, students were whispering to each other about the blond boy making his way towards the hat.

“The Selwyns were all Death Eaters,” Eret told George. “Corvus Selwyn is in Azkaban right now for the torture of Xenophilius Lovegood during the Second Wizarding War.”

George had no clue what a Death Eater was or what Azkaban was or who the Xenophilius person was, but he could tell by the grave way in which Eret told George the information that these were all very significant terms.

So Dream came from an infamous family. Who cared? George certainly didn’t.

The Sorting Hat was on Dream’s head for a very long time. The entire Great Hall was tense, every eye fixed firmly on the boy with the large hat pulled over his eyes.

Just when George thought the hat might have broken, a single word rang out.

“SLYTHERIN!”

Only the Slytherin table applauded the decision. When Dream took off the hat, he looked furious. George wanted to run to his friend, to tell him that everything would be okay and that it was just a stupid House, but Dream quickly disappeared from view when Schlatt pulled the blond to sit next to him at their table.

Dream would be okay, George decided. He wasn't alone. Schlatt was also in Slytherin, and perhaps Dream would make friends with the strange Minx girl who had been on their boat. Everything would be alright.

George refocused just in time to hear “Soot, Wilbur” called out. It took the hat about a minute, but the tall curly-haired boy was soon happily joining George and Eret at the Ravenclaw table.

“Hello there, lads!” he greeted the two first-years happily. “You got to be blue after all, George!”

“I know! It's incredible!”

The Sorting Ceremony concluded soon after that. Eret let out a squeal of delight when it was announced that the feast would begin, and George saw Wilbur roll his eyes fondly at the boy's enthusiasm. As food magically appeared on the table before him, George realized that he was absolutely *ravenous*.

The food at the banquet tasted better than anything George had ever eaten in his life. He ate until he felt like he would burst, and even then he was tempted to sneak a pumpkin pasty under his robes for later.

After everyone was finished eating, the Headmistress stood up and began reading from a piece of paper.

“Before your prefects show you to your dormitories, I have a few start-of-term notices to give you,” she said in a clear voice. “First years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. Mr. Filch, the caretaker, would like me to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors. As for quidditch, trials will be held in the second week of the term. Anyone interested in playing for their house teams should contact Madam Hooch.”

Several students seemed to perk up at the mention of quidditch. George wondered if Dream would try out for the Slytherin team.

“And now to conclude this evening, let us all sing our Hogwarts school song in honor of my predecessor, Albus Dumbledore, who died defending this very castle. Everybody pick their favorite tune, and we shall begin.”

George tried to sing along, but it was an impossible task due to the fact that everyone was singing a different melody and George didn't know the lyrics.

"Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,

Teach us something please,

Whether we be old and bald

Or young with scabby knees,  
Our heads could do with filling  
With some interesting stuff,  
For now they're bare and full of air,  
Dead flies and bits of fluff,  
So teach us things worth knowing,  
Bring back what we've forgot,  
Just do your best, we'll do the rest,  
And learn until our brains all rot."

Once the song concluded, the prefects stood up and began to lead the other students out of the Great Hall and to the various common rooms. George tried to say goodbye to Dream before he was escorted up a marble staircase, but he couldn't find his best friend among the crowd.

The Ravenclaw students walked for what felt like ages. Phil led them down several different corridors and up countless flights of stairs, making George wonder if their common room was even *in* the castle, or if maybe Phil was pulling some sort of prank on them. Eventually though, the group paused by a very long and daunting spiral staircase.

"This here is Ravenclaw Tower," Phil announced. "Up this staircase is the entrance to the most beautiful common room in the castle. We're on the top floor, which means Ravenclaws get to enjoy a spectacular view of the entire school grounds! Alright everyone, let's go!"

The staircase was steep and took a lot of effort to climb. After what felt like ages, George, Eret, Wilbur, and the other first-years all made it to the top and gathered around Phil, panting for air.

"Can we go in, please? I'm exhausted," a girl George recognized from the Sorting Ceremony asked the prefect. Phil smiled at the question and launched into another explanation.

"If you can go in or not depends on whether you can successfully answer the eagle knocker," Phil explained, gesturing to a bronze knocker in the shape of an eagle on the door. "Every time you enter the common room, the eagle will give you a riddle. You get one shot to answer it correctly; if you don't, then you have to wait for the next person to come along and help you answer it."

Beside George, Eret groaned. "You mean we have to pass a test every time we need to get inside?" he asked, voice colored with disbelief.

"Think of it more as a... daily exercise!"

"Isn't just climbin' up this staircase enough of a daily exercise?" Somebody called out from the crowd.

Phil chuckled, "Alright then, a daily exercise *for the brain*, is that better? Only those with minds worthy of Rowena Ravenclaw herself are permitted to enter our common room, and the riddles are designed to allow in only those who possess true wisdom!"

“So if we fail we’re stupid?”

“You said it, not me, I’m just followin’ the script,” Phil snickered, “You wanna give it a shot?” he asked the heckler, who muttered in disagreement. “Fine then, how about you?” he asked the girl from earlier.

George watched as she hesitantly reached out and gave the knocker three sharp knocks.

Suddenly, the bronze eagle came to life. A clear, whimsical voice sounded from its beak as it gave her a riddle.

“Where does one enter blind and exit seeing?”

All at once, the group went silent, thinking. Phil smiled at the sight of so many pensive faces.

“Well, Robinson? What is your answer?” he asked the girl who had used the knocker.

“I don’t know,” she said, unsure. After another encouraging smile from Phil, she cleared her throat and guessed.

“Um...a hospital? Like St. Mungo’s? They might be able to cure blindness,” she told the knocker. The door remained closed.

“Ooh, tough luck. Next!” the prefect called out.

Wilbur stepped forward, this time. The eagle repeated the riddle when he knocked on it.

“I think it’s sleep,” he said. “When you go to sleep, you close your eyes, so you’re blind. Then you wake up and you can see again. So the answer to the question is unconsciousness.”

*Surely that’s the answer*, George thought to himself. Wilbur had sounded so confident in his response, and George thought it was a logical enough assumption. To his surprise, however, the knocker remained silent and the door stayed closed.

“Interesting approach, but not quite, it seems,” Phil told Wilbur with a shrug. “Next!”

“Why don’t you give it a try, George?” Eret whispered into George’s ear, nudging his shoulder.

“I’m not sure that I could—”

“George! You were talkin, get up here!” Phil called, overhearing his reply to Eret.

Not wanting to look scared, George gulped and approached the knocker. It repeated its question once more, and George closed his eyes as he thought about the riddle.

*Think, George*, he thought to himself. *Enter blind. Exit seeing. Blind. Seeing. Blindness can be physical, like your own colorblindness, but it can also be a state of mind.*

The answer came to George suddenly. “A school,” he stated. “I think that blindness here refers to ignorance, like how you can be blind to a person’s suffering, for example. When you enter school, you are ignorant, but you leave with knowledge. Therefore, school opens your eyes to the world.”

There was a second’s pause in which George thought he had failed, but then the door swung open.

“Well done, George! That’s a Ravenclaw answer if I’ve ever heard one,” Phil congratulated the first-year.

The children finally entered the common room, gasping at what they saw. Phil hadn't been exaggerating, the Ravenclaw common room was beautiful. The room was wide and circular, airier than any other room George had ever seen. Graceful arched windows punctuated the walls, which were hung with blue-and-bronze silks: by day, George was sure that they would have a spectacular view of the surrounding mountains. The ceiling was domed and painted with stars, which were echoed in the midnight-blue carpet. There were tables, chairs, and bookcases, and in a niche opposite the door stood a tall statue of white marble.

"Blimey," Eret whispered at the sight.

"Indeed," Wilbur agreed.

"That there is a statue of our founder, Rowena Ravenclaw," Phil explained with pride, "Our dormitories are in turrets off the main tower; there are four students to a room. You'll know which one's yours based off of the names on the doors. Make friends with your roommates, because you'll be living together for the next seven years!"

George wondered who he'd be placed with. There were only eight Ravenclaw boys in his year, so there was a good chance he'd be with Eret or Wilbur.

"Oh, and by the way, your belongings have already been transported to your rooms, so off you go! And once again: well done on becoming a member of the cleverest, quirkiest and most interesting house at Hogwarts!"

The first-years excitedly climbed the staircases to the dormitories. George made his way up one of the boys' turrets, scanning the doors for his name. Finally, he stopped in front of a door with four names on the front of it:

Davidson, George

Eretson, Alastair

Soot, Wilbur

Technoblade, Dave

George grinned when he saw that two of his roommates were Eret and Wilbur. He couldn't quite remember hearing the name Technoblade at the Sorting Ceremony, but it was probably because he had tuned out by the time the surnames beginning with the letter T were called.

The room looked just as Phil had described. George glimpsed the trunk which contained his belongings placed underneath the bed by the window.

"You got the window? Lucky lad," Wilbur told him as he found his own bed. Eret soon came in and complained that his bed was too close to the door, and wondered out loud if he could get away with swapping his bed with their fourth roommate's before the other boy got there.

"Nah, I like my bed, thanks," came a voice from the front of the room that George recognized as the heckler from before. He turned towards the door and saw a boy with straight brown hair and rectangular-framed glasses looking at Eret with a quirked eyebrow.



“Oh, hey! I wasn’t going to actually swap our beds, um, I was just...joking?” Eret stammered.

Their fourth roommate smirked. “Sure.”

“I remember you from the ceremony,” Wilbur interjected. “Technoblade, was it? Or would you prefer we call you something else?”

“Call me Techno.”

“Techno it is. The name’s Wilbur. Pleasure to meet you,” Wilbur said pleasantly, extending a hand towards their new roommate. Techno shook it before turning to George expectantly.

“I’m George,” the shorter boy introduced himself.

“Oh, you solved the door riddle. Good for you, I woulda fallen asleep in the hallway if I had to listen to that riddle one more time,” Techno nodded appreciatively.

“Well then, why didn’t *you* try to solve it?” Wilbur asked with a smile.

Techno shrugged, “The carpet outside isn’t *that* uncomfortable, it wouldn’ta been a big deal.”

Eret snickered, “Well I’m Eret, and I think the beds here are definitely an upgrade from the hallway carpet.”

Once the boys had finished introducing themselves, they took turns getting ready for bed. There was only one washroom between the four of them, which was a *tad* inconvenient, but George was optimistic that they would figure out some sort of schedule in due time.

George couldn’t wait for the next day to arrive. There were so many things he was excited to see and do, not to mention so much he wanted to tell Dream. His thoughts drifted to his best friend, and George wondered how the other boy was coping after the ceremony. George hoped Dream had nice roommates.

That night, George dreamt of magic castles and starry skies.

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George awoke to a loud knocking on his door.

It took him several moments to remember where he was. When he opened his eyes, he was gazing up at the blue canopy of his four poster bed.

His four poster bed in Ravenclaw Tower at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

“Rise and shine, boys! Your class schedules are downstairs in the common room. Breakfast will only be served in the Great Hall for the next forty-five minutes!” shouted a voice that George recognized as belonging to Phil the prefect.

On the opposite side of the room, Eret groaned.

“What time is it?” he rasped, voice still scratchy from sleep.

George glanced at his watch which he'd placed on his bedside table the night before. "It's almost seven in the morning," he answered, stretching his limbs before climbing out of bed. He briefly contemplated taking a shower, but decided he'd much rather shower in the evening, so he settled on simply washing his face and brushing his teeth. When George reached into his trunk to pull out a pair of school robes, he noticed that the inside lining had turned blue during the night and a Ravenclaw crest had appeared where a breast pocket would be. His tie had similarly changed color and was now striped blue and bronze.

He was truly a Ravenclaw now, and the thought filled him with pride.

He made his way downstairs with Wilbur, who had quickly gotten ready and insisted they walk to the Great Hall together. On their way out of the common room, a tall girl with long dreadlocks and a blue prefect badge pinned to the front of her robe asked them their names. After a few moments, she handed them each a bit of parchment on which their names were printed.

"These are your schedules. They're enchanted to be waterproof, so don't worry if you spill anything on them. If you lose your own schedule, you can check your friends'; all first-year Ravenclaws have the same classes."

"Thank you," George said, dipping his head politely at the prefect. He tucked the parchment in his pocket, resolving to take a closer look at his class schedule after breakfast.

"I'll be honest with you, George," Wilbur said to the shorter boy as they descended the spiral staircase that led down from Ravenclaw Tower. "I have no clue where the Great Hall is."

"Me neither," George replied, grimacing.

It took them about twenty minutes to find the Great Hall. One of the ghosts had watched them take six consecutive wrong turns and decided to take pity on them, giving them directions. George didn't know if he'd ever get used to interacting with literal *ghosts*, but he was nonetheless grateful for the help.

When the boys entered the Great Hall, Wilbur made a beeline for the Ravenclaw table. George hesitated, and Wilbur seemed to understand his intentions immediately.

"Go on, George. I'll save you a seat," the curly-haired boy offered kindly.

George thanked his Housemate before speed-walking towards the Slytherin students. He picked Dream out immediately; his best friend was sitting across from Schlatt all the way at the end of the table, half-heartedly peeling a hardboiled egg.

Schlatt saw George first. The Slytherin boy smiled at the Ravenclaw and pointed him out to Dream, whose face immediately lit up upon seeing the shorter boy.

"George!" Dream exclaimed, waving his best friend over.

George paid no mind to the odd looks that the other Slytherins cast his way; he only had eyes for the freckled blond first-year. "Dream," George greeted his friend warmly, taking a seat next to the other boy at the Slytherin table.

"How's your nerd House?" Dream asked good-naturedly, nodding at the Ravenclaw crest now adorning George's robes.

George grinned and began to recount the events of the previous night, telling Dream all about the winding staircases and the common room and his three roommates. Dream shook his head when

George told him how he solved the eagle knocker's riddle.

"See? Nerd. I'm happy for you, though," Dream chuckled.

"Thanks. How was your night? What happened after the Ceremony?" George inquired. Dream's smile faltered at the question, and the blond boy shrugged.

"Saw the common room. There's no cool riddle to get in or anything, just a password. It's in the dungeons, which is pretty creepy. Everything in our common room is green, which is cool, I guess."

"He has the best roommate ever," Schlatt butted in, prompting Dream to roll his eyes.

"Yeah, I'm stuck with this guy and two other snakes."

Just then, the girl who George recognized as Justine Minx walked by the table and glared at the three first-years. "Who invited the smurf?" she sneered, appraising his blue robes.

"I did. Got a problem, Minx?" Dream shot back.

"This isn't his table, Selwyn."

"Oh, come on. No one cares. Just go finish your breakfast and leave us alone."

Minx's eyes narrowed, but she turned around and left the boys to their chat.

"I better return to the Ravenclaw table. Wilbur said he'd save me a seat," George said reluctantly.

"Wait, George. Can we compare our schedules first?" Dream asked, pulling out his own timetable. George enthusiastically agreed, and the best friends spent the next several moments scanning each other's pieces of parchment.

"Look! We have DADA together!" Dream pointed out excitedly.

"What's DADA?"

"Defense Against the Dark Arts. Read your schedule, you dummy."

George *did* read the schedule, noticing another shared class as he did so.

"We're in Potions together, too!" the shorter boy exclaimed. "*And* History of Magic!"

"Not in Flying together, though. Bummer."

"Oh, look, we have Astronomy together, too — wait, *what?* They expect us to come to class at *midnight?*"

Schlatt snorted at George's scandalized expression. "You have to be able to see the stars, buddy."

"*Still.* I'm going to have to start liking coffee if I want to stay awake for *that* class."

Just then, a Slytherin prefect walked over to where they were sitting.

"Oi, first-years! Breakfast finishes in ten minutes, so hurry up!" she called out before pointing at George. "And *you* should get back to the Ravenclaw table."

George muttered an apology to the prefect and jogged back to the blue table where his roommates

were already finishing up their meals.

“Took you long enough,” Wilbur said as George sat down next to him. “How’s Selwyn?”

“*Dream*,” George corrected, “is fine. He’s rooming with Schlatt.”

Wilbur nodded at the words. “Good for him,” he said. “Schlatt’s alright. Bit of a git, sometimes, but not a bad guy. Some of the other Slytherins look downright *rotten* .”

“I think they look alright,” Techno said, his eyes scanning the Slytherin table appraisingly. “The talkin’ hat was thinkin’ ‘bout putting me in there. Seemed to change its mind at the last minute, though.”

Eret’s eyes widened. “The same thing happened to me! It kept muttering about how I would fit in well with that crowd. Guess it was never meant to be, though.”

Suddenly, a transparent glowing head phased through the table right in between the boys, causing George to choke on a bite of croissant.

“Bloody hell!” Eret spluttered, nearly spilling his goblet of pumpkin juice.

“Sorry to interrupt, boys, but your classes begin in ten minutes, and I wouldn’t want to see any students from *my* House arriving late on the first day,” the ghost — a woman, George realized — informed them in a quiet voice.

“Are you the Gray Lady? Our House ghost?” Techno asked, seemingly unfazed by the appearance of the specter.

The ghostly woman smiled. “That I am, child. Now hurry along! Don’t be late!” she said before disappearing in a cloud of white mist.

Finding their way to the correct classroom was very difficult. Phil had informed them the previous night that there were a hundred and forty-two staircases at Hogwarts: wide, sweeping ones; narrow, rickety ones; some that led somewhere different on a Friday; some with a vanishing step halfway up that you had to remember to jump. Then there were doors that wouldn’t open unless you asked politely, or tickled them in exactly the right place, and doors that weren’t really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending. It was also very hard to remember where anything was, because it all seemed to move around a lot. The people in the portraits kept going to visit each other, and George was sure the coats of armor could walk.

Eventually, though, they made it to Transfiguration. Their professor — a tall man with swept back brown hair and piercing brown eyes — greeted them with a nod and instructed them to take their seats. There were several Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw students already sat at desks around the room, and George waved to the boy he’d met on the boat the night before.

What was his name, again? Kyle? George hoped that he would remember it by the end of the lesson.

When everyone was present, their professor introduced himself as Professor Talbott Winger, former Ravenclaw and registered animagus. Before George could ask what an *animagus* was, the wizard before them had morphed into an eagle.

“That’s so *cool*!” the Hufflepuff boy whose name George couldn’t remember shouted excitedly. Their professor flapped his wings before turning back into a human in midair.

"It *is* cool, Mr. Jacobs. Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts," he said. "Anyone messing around in my class will leave and not come back. You have been warned. Now please open *A Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration* to page four. Today, you will learn about the Transfiguration alphabet."

George opened his textbook, pulling out a quill and new roll of parchment to take notes. As Professor Winger began his lecture on the twenty-six symbols that made up the Transfiguration alphabet, George felt giddy with excitement.

This was all *real*. He was *really* a wizard, and he was going to spend the next seven years of his life studying the world of magic. George couldn't wait to learn *everything*.

Chapter End Notes

This was so much fun to write. Let me know what you guys thought! Also, I have another survey y'all can fill out if you like. It's about future updates. Here is the link: <https://forms.gle/MpGfn5etakXwDZhG8>

Also, I am setting a tentative date for the next chapter release: Friday, October 23. Hopefully I can make it :)

References:

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, chapters 6 & 7 (descriptions of the castle + McGonagall quotes & songs), chapter 8 (description of hallway + McGonagall quote)
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, chapter 29 (description of Ravenclaw common room)

Harry Potter Wiki

(https://harrypotter.fandom.com/wiki/Ravenclaw_Girls%27_Dormitory) (description of Ravenclaw common room)

Class schedules generated thanks to this spreadsheet generator by u/LittleDinghy on Reddit:

https://www.reddit.com/r/HPfanfiction/comments/b93g9f/harry_potter_and_the_hogwarts_class_sc

Chapter Four || Year One

Chapter Summary

Dream challenges Techno to a duel.

Chapter Notes

Hello friends! I'm a bit early with this one because I was so happy after midterms that I just poured it into my fic lol. I hope you guys like it :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George soon found out that there was a lot more to magic than waving his wand and saying a few funny words.

He hadn't experienced a single burst of uncontrolled magic since he'd stepped foot inside the confines of the castle. The tingling feeling was still *there*, an ever-present warmth just beneath his skin, but George had to *work* to unlock it, now.

That was the thing George realized in his first week at Hogwarts — magic was *hard*. The first-years hadn't even begun to use their wands in most of their classes yet, instead being asked by their professors to complete staggering amounts of homework and read countless pages of theory from their textbooks. He often stayed awake past curfew, scribbling notes onto parchment by the light of the fire in the common room.

It was exhausting, but George loved every second of it.

Dream, on the other hand, complained non-stop.

"This *sucks*," he groaned one evening as the two boys attempted to complete a short essay question on the invention of self-stirring cauldrons for their History of Magic class. Rather, *George* attempted to complete the essay question; Dream only seemed interested in whining about how useless the subject was.

"Professor Binns is so boring!" the blond groaned. "Why would they even let a ghost teach a class?"

George hummed, flipping the page of his textbook. "I dunno, Dream," he said. "I find his class quite interesting. You wizards have had magic for *years* and only got around to inventing the self-stirring cauldron in 1962? Just think about how much more could have been accomplished in the field of Potionmaking if—"

"You are *such* a nerd."

The comment made the tips of George's ears go red, which made Dream laugh and earned them a *shush* from an annoyed Madam Pince.

“Whatever,” George grumbled, pouting. “Write your own essay, then, if I’m such a nerd.”

At this, Dream changed his tune.

“*Noooo* , Georgie! I’m sorry. I need your Ravenclaw brain.”

“Ask me nicely.”

Dream gave George the biggest puppy-dog eyes. “Please?”

“Please *what* ?” George prompted, enjoying his friend’s theatrics.

“ *Please* help me write this essay, oh wise Georgie the Ravenclaw?”

“Fine. You owe me, though.”

~~~~~

As the weeks at Hogwarts passed, George noticed that Dream didn’t spend very much time around his fellow Slytherins.

At first, George hadn’t asked him about it. He remembered how angry the blond boy had seemed after the Sorting Ceremony, and George didn’t want to say anything that would put his friend back in a sour mood. Just *mentioning* Dream’s House brought a scowl to his freckled face.

Plus, George *enjoyed* having Dream by his side. They had settled into a comfortable routine at Hogwarts: Dream would eat breakfast at the Slytherin table with Schlatt before heading off to his morning classes, then eat lunch and dinner with George and his roommates at the Ravenclaw table. The prefects let them get away with their table-swapping, for the most part. Phil (or Philza, as most of his Housemates affectionately called him) took pity on Dream when it became obvious that almost all of the blond’s friends were Ravenclaws.

One day, an owl swooped down and dropped a letter on Dream’s lap while he was talking to George during lunch.

“Who’s it from?” George inquired, stabbing a potato with his fork.

Dream paused to open the letter, then immediately tore it in half and glared at the shreds of parchment. George wondered what the letter could have said to make his best friend react in such a way. The other first-year Ravenclaws were similarly taken aback.

“What’s gotten into you, Selwyn?” Techno asked before George could say anything, giving the blond boy a curious look.

The question made Dream’s eyes flash and face morph into a scowl. “Don’t call me that,” he snapped.

Techno looked surprised for a second, but he quickly shrugged it off with a snicker, “ *Someone’s* got his wand in a knot today.”

Dream whirled around to face the other boy, looking murderous. “It’s *Dream* , troll-brain. Get it

into that Ravenclaw head already.”

“Let’s all calm down here, lads,” Wilbur said, putting a hand on Techno’s shoulder, who eyed it for a moment before turning back to Dream.

“Listen, *Dream*,” Techno massaged the bridge of his nose, “You don’t needa make a huge deal outta your own name. If it really bothers you that much you can go change it, just remind me when I slip up, it’s that easy.”

“But you *always* slip up, you’re not even *trying* to remember!” Dream yelled, looking defeated, “Whatever, I’m leaving, see you later George.” He said curtly, gathering his textbooks as he stood from the table.

Before George could respond, Techno muttered under his breath, “You’re bein’ really dramatic. I thought you hated your dad, are you really gonna follow in his footsteps and run away the second your side starts losin’?”

The boys fell quiet immediately.

Wilbur coughed nervously. “Techno, was that really—”

Techno huffed, rolling his eyes, “Listen, I get it if this kid wants to pretend like nothin’ happened and like his name means nothin’ but *my* father died fighting on the *right* side of that war, Wilbur.”

“Techno, Dream didn’t mean—” George began, trying to diffuse the situation.

“I get what you’re tryna do, George, but regardless of what he *meant* with this whole ‘Dream’ thing it doesn’t change the fact that he’s tryin’ to hide a name that has hurt a ton of people.” Techno explained, his eyes narrowing at the plate in front of him, “It just feels like he’s tryin’ to erase history instead of ownin’ up the fact that his family was a bunch of death eaters.”

“I-I’m not trying to ‘erase’ anything!” Dream exclaimed, “Everyone *knows* who my family is regardless of what I have them call me! I can’t *hide* from it, okay? Nobody else has a problem calling me Dream except *you* !”

Techno considered this for a moment before shaking his head, “Sorry man, I just can’t respect it. People *didn’t* know who you were instantly, you were hidin’ behind a fake name until you got exposed. To me it just makes you look like a coward.”

“I’m no coward,” Dream hissed.

“Then prove it,” Techno shrugged.

“Fine. Duel me. Tomorrow. In the courtyard. Midnight.”

“Woah woah woah, duel?! Nah, dude, I just want you to own up to your name, pay some reparations or somethin’—.”

“What are you, *scared*?”

Techno's surprised expression instantly morphed into a glare. “Alright. You’re on.”

Dream grinned, finally departing from the table as he stormed off.

Techno huffed, “Well there goes *my* Wednesday night.” He muttered, poking his fork at the food in front of him.



George paled, his appetite suddenly gone. A duel? They didn't even *know* any offensive spells yet. What was Dream thinking?

~~~~~

"Let me in, you stupid bird head!"

A comical sight greeted George when the brunet arrived at the entrance to his common room after his Herbology lesson. Dream was standing in front of the door, pointing his wand at the bronze eagle knocker threateningly, as if he could intimidate it into granting him entrance.

"Uh...Dream?" George called out, puzzled.

The blond boy spun around at the sound of George's voice, a blush coloring his cheeks once he realized he'd been caught trying to break in.

"Oh, uh, hey George."

"Why are you threatening our knocker?"

"It wouldn't let me in even though I answered the stupid question."

George paused, trying not to snort at the way Dream appeared so *angry* at the bronze eagle.

"And *why* are you trying to break into our common room?"

"I need your help," Dream said. "I need to talk to you about my duel with Techno."

George quieted, expression turning serious. "You know Techno's in Ravenclaw too, right? Our common room probably isn't the best place to talk."

"Fine, then, whatever. We can go to the library or something. I just need your help."

"Okay, let me put my books away."

Dream snorted. "Good luck getting in. This bird doesn't know what she's talking about."

George gave the knocker three loud knocks, bringing the eagle to life.

"*To be, or not to be?*" the familiar whimsical voice asked.

"See?" Dream said. "What kind of an idiotic question is that? It's not even a freaking *riddle*—"

"I don't think the answers are mutually exclusive. Life is not inherently positive, negative, or neutral, so there is no 'correct' answer, because that would imply that we can assign objective value to existence. It's all up to the individual." George said, expression unfazed.

The door swung open.

Dream gaped at the shorter boy, seemingly at a loss for words.

George chuckled. "It already asked this one once when I was with Phil," He explained, "What'd *you* say?"

Dream looked embarrassed. “I said yes.”

“*What?* It wasn’t even a yes or no question!”

“I don’t know! I thought I could outsmart it!”

“Idiot.”

“Nerd.”

George rolled his eyes. “Meet me in the library in ten minutes.”

~~~~~

Ten minutes later, the boys were at their favorite library table, copies of *Defensive Magical Theory* and *A Beginner’s Guide to Dueling* spread out before them.

“Find me a spell that’ll teach him a lesson,” Dream instructed his friend. “Like the Tempest Jinx. That one makes bolts of lightning strike from the sky.”

“Dream, we barely even know how to perform *Wingardium Leviosa* . There’s *no way* you’ll be able to summon lightning bolts.”

“Fine. How about *Tentacifors* ? That one would transfigure his head into a giant tentacle.”

“Last time I checked, you weren’t even able to transfigure a matchstick into a needle. What makes you think you could pull off *Tentacifors* ?”

“I don’t know, George, just find me something! I can’t lose this duel.”

George sighed, closing the book. “I still don’t understand why you challenged him to a duel. You don’t even *know* how to duel.”

“He called me a *coward* , George. I’m no coward.”

George looked into Dream’s eyes and saw the steely determination reflected in them. As stupid and unnecessary as George thought the duel was, he knew that nothing would stand in Dream’s way now that his honor was on the line.

“Alright, Dream,” George said, thinking. “I think the two spells you need are *Expelliarmus* and *Flipendo* . They’re in our first-year curriculum, so they should be manageable. First, you disarm him, then you use the knockback jinx.”

“Sounds kinda lame.”

“No, it sounds *doable*. You want to win the duel, right?”

“Yes , ” Dream said seriously.

“Then you need a strategy that is simple, yet effective. Even though he’s still a first-year, Techno is *scarily* good at DADA. He spends almost every evening poring over *The Art of Defense* in the common room. There’s a good chance that he’ll hit you with a jinx before you can even utter a

single spell.”

Dream nodded, quickly following George’s line of reasoning. “I have to disarm him before he can do anything to me.”

“Exactly. Without his wand, he’ll be useless.”

Resolve burned in Dream’s eyes like fire, and George shivered at the sight.

When Dream put his mind to something, he was unstoppable.

“Let’s go to the courtyard,” the blond declared, standing up. “Bring the textbook. I’m going to disarm you so many times your head’ll spin.”

~~~~~

“*Expelliarmus!*” Dream shouted for the umpteenth time, pointing his wand at George. To Dream’s utter frustration, George’s own wand remained in his hand. Only a handful of faint red sparks appeared in the air, the only evidence that Dream had even attempted to cast a spell.

“Well, at least you made light, this time,” George said optimistically. Dream just groaned and got into position to try again.

“Why are you muffins trying to disarm each other?” a voice sounded from behind them.

The boys turned around and met the curious gaze of a boy with flat brown hair and crooked glasses. Dream tensed, straightening his back.

“What did you just call us?” the taller boy asked defensively.

“Muffins. You know, like the baked goods.”

“Is that an insult?”

“No!”

Dream looked like he didn’t quite know what to make of the boy. He crossed his arms across his chest.

“To answer your question, I have a duel tomorrow, so I’m practicing for it.”

The boy — either Hufflepuff or Slytherin, George couldn’t quite tell what color his scarf was — gasped. “A *duel* ? But you two are first-years! Why would you be dueling?”

“None of your business,” Dream huffed. “Who are you, anyway?”

The older boy didn’t seem to be put off by Dream’s snappy tone; on the contrary, he smiled at the opportunity to introduce himself. “My name’s Baddeus Halo, but most people call me Bad. I’m in my second year.”

“Bad’s an ironic name for a Hufflepuff,” Dream said.

So the scarf is yellow, then , George noted to himself.

Bad laughed at the comment. “I know! I get that all the time. I could help you muffins if you want. Professor Chang taught us disarming last year, and I was pretty good at it.”

Dream shook his head, looking annoyed. “No thanks. I think we got it.”

George rolled his eyes at Dream’s stubbornness. “Actually,” he butted in, looking at Bad as he spoke, “I think we *could* use some help.”

Dream glared at George, looking betrayed, but George ignored him.

“I’d love to help you guys!” Bad grinned, pulling out his wand. “I’ve been watching you trying to cast the spell for the past five minutes, and I think your wand movement needs work. Here, let me show you...”

Bad aimed his wand at George before taking a deep breath and uttering the incantation. “*Expelliarmus* !” he exclaimed, rotating his wrist fluidly as he did so. A bright red light appeared from the tip of the Hufflepuff’s wand, hitting George squarely in the chest. George felt a wave of energy seize his hand as his wand was flung across the courtyard.

Dream’s eyes went wide. Bad looked immensely pleased with himself.

“Okay. *How* did you do that?” Dream demanded.

“I told you. It’s all in the wand movement. Your wrist rotation is too stiff.”

“He’s right,” George said, eyes calculating. “Our textbook said you have to channel your magic from your chest to your wand via the arm. The way you bend your wrist cuts off the flow of energy before it can be released.”

Dream scrunched his nose, thinking. “So I have to loosen my wrist. Okay. Lemme try again.”

This time when Dream cast the spell, a few red sparks actually flew far enough to hit George. The shorter boy’s wand wobbled in his hand, but ultimately stayed put.

“You’re getting it!” Bad cheered.

“Again,” Dream demanded, expression focused on the task at hand.

It took several more attempts, but eventually Dream was able to send a beam of red light straight at George, who gaped when his wand clattered to the floor.

Bad looked thrilled. “You’re a *really* smart muffin, aren’t you? That took me forever to learn, but it only took you a few hours!”

Dream smiled at the praise from the older Hufflepuff.

“Thanks, Bad. You helped a lot.”

“You’re welcome! I love helping friends learn new spells.”

George smiled at the older boy’s use of the word *friend* so soon after meeting the two first-years. Dream looked similarly amused.

“What else do you need to learn? Not anything violent, I hope,” Bad asked nervously.

“The Knockback Jinx. We haven’t studied it in Charms class, yet, so it would be pretty cool if you could help us out, actually,” Dream smoothly replied.

“Oh, I can help you with that one! But you have to promise that you won’t try to hurt anyone with it.”

“...I need to know it for a duel, though.”

“Yeah, but it’s not, like, a *serious* duel. Right?”

Dream and George exchanged a glance.

“...sure.”

“Okay, then! When you cast *Flipendo* , it’s all about getting the perfect checkmark motion with your wand. Imagine you’re ticking something off your to-do list...”

Bad spent the next hour coaching Dream on how to cast the Knockback Jinx. It took many failed attempts and several misfires, but Dream was eventually able to send his best friend falling backwards into a stone wall three consecutive times.

“Awesome!” the tall boy cried. “Okay, George, let’s try again.”

George stood up, wincing in pain. “I think you’ve practiced enough, Dream. I’m going to be covered in bruises tomorrow.”

“Oops.” Dream had the decency to look apologetic. “Sorry about that.”

“You’re a natural, Dream,” Bad praised the Slytherin, a hint of pride in his voice. George thought it was sweet how quickly Bad had accepted the first-years as his friends. The Hufflepuff was genuinely *kind* .

Dream thanked Bad earnestly for his help, then gasped when he glanced down at his watch and saw the time.

“Dinner’s almost over in the Great Hall! We better hurry if we don’t want to go to bed hungry,” the blond told George. The three boys quickly left the courtyard and began speed-walking to dinner.

“It was nice meeting you muffins,” Bad said in a friendly voice as he began walking towards the Hufflepuff table. “Stop by Hufflepuff anytime! I always have time for my friends!”

The first-years waved goodbye as the older boy walked off.

“He’s really nice,” Dream commented. George nodded in agreement.

“Are you sitting with us tonight?” the shorter boy asked his friend hopefully. He was disappointed but not surprised when Dream shook his head.

“I’ll eat with Schlatt. It’d be too awkward to sit with Ravenclaw. I don’t really want to see Techno right now.”

George understood. “Okay. I’ll see you tomorrow, then,” he said as the boys went their separate ways.

George couldn’t stop eyeing Techno all evening, wondering what his fellow Ravenclaw would bring to the duel. Even though Dream was a promising wizard, George didn’t like the thought of

his best friend going wand-to-wand against his roommate.

All he could do was hope that neither of them got hurt.

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“Are you coming with me tonight?” Dream asked George after their shared Potions class the next day. The blond had been uncharacteristically jumpy all day in anticipation of his midnight duel.

“Of course,” George responded, bumping Dream’s shoulder with his own. “I wouldn’t let you go off and duel alone.”

“Thanks,” Dream said, sounding relieved.

George grimaced, a thought occurring to him. “We’ll lose a lot of House Points if we get caught out past curfew, though. Detention too, probably.”

Dream waved his hand dismissively. “Slytherin can get negative House Points for all I care. And as for detention, we’ll be sneaky.”

George rolled his eyes at his friend’s confidence. “I’ll ask Philza about silencing charms when I get back to the common room. I’ll tell him I’m tired of Eret’s snoring.”

The boys turned a corner, then, and nearly bumped into Minx.

“Watch it, Davidson,” she spat, side-stepping George with a glare. Once the girl was out of earshot, George turned to Dream.

“What’s her problem with me?” the shorter boy asked.

“She’s like that with everyone,” Dream replied. “I wouldn’t take it personally. Anyway, meet me outside the Slytherin common room a few minutes before midnight. Schlatt told me about a secret staircase you can take just off the entrance to Ravenclaw tower so you won’t get caught.”

“Alright. See you later, Dream.”

~~~~~

George was careful not to make much noise as he tiptoed downstairs from his dormitory. Luckily, there were no prefects awake in the common room to see him sneak out. He followed Dream’s instructions, silently making his way down the spiral staircase and out of Ravenclaw Tower. He found the secret staircase without much trouble — it was behind a painting that, upon closer inspection, wasn’t a painting at all. George outstretched his hand, expecting his fingertips to meet canvas, but gasped when his arm passed right through the wall.

Hogwarts was *brilliant*.

He was about to step through the invisible entrance when a voice made his heart stop.

“Where are you going, child?”

George nearly screamed when he turned around to see the transparent face of his House ghost looking at him curiously.

“Out,” he whispered in reply, hoping that the Gray Lady wasn’t about to tell Filch about his late-night outing. To George’s relief, the ghost merely smiled at him fondly.

“You first-years are always going on adventures late at night. Don’t stay out too late, young man. I’ll try to warn you if I see anyone coming.”

“Thanks, Gray Lady.”

“Call me Helena,” she said before vanishing into thin air.

Ghostly encounter out of the way, George made his way down the secret staircase until he was finally in the dungeons. He peered his head out of another fake painting and glanced up and down the hallway, making sure the coast was clear before stepping outside and walking towards the Slytherin common room. Luckily, Dream was already there, waiting for his friend in the shadows behind a large potted plant.

“*Dream,*” George whispered into the darkness.

Dream turned to face the shorter boy, smiling when they made eye contact. The blond hurriedly jogged over to his friend, whispering a greeting once he was close enough.

“Ready for your duel?” George asked.

“Ready enough.”

Luckily, they made their way to the courtyard without bumping into any on-duty prefects. The boys hid in the shadows as they waited for Techno to arrive.

Five minutes passed in silence. George glanced down at his watch.

Three minutes to midnight.

Dream began to twirl his wand absentmindedly in his hands, expression deep in thought. George could see his friend mouthing incantations as if going over the spells in his head.

One minute to midnight.

George watched the seconds tick by with bated breath.

Midnight.

The shorter boy looked up, expecting to see Techno and maybe Wilbur walking up to the designated meeting place, but there was a sign of movement in the courtyard.

“Give ‘em a few minutes,” Dream muttered, seeing the way George’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

Five more minutes passed. No sign of Technoblade.

Dream looked annoyed.

“What the heck,” he whispered, sounding irked. “We said midnight. Is your watch fast or something?”

“No,” George murmured in reply, growing more confused with every passing second.

Ten minutes soon passed without any sign of Dream’s opponent.

“He calls *me* a coward, then doesn’t even have the decency to show up. What a loser,” the blond muttered angrily.

“Maybe a prefect caught him. Or Filch,” George reasoned. Dream just grumbled in response.

“Well if there isn’t going to be a duel, we might as well get back to our common rooms. I have classes in the morning.”

The boys shuffled along the walls of the courtyard until they made it to the side entrance of the castle. George was secretly relieved that Technoblade hadn’t shown up. Even though he *knew* Dream was a capable young wizard, he didn’t like the idea of his best friend participating in a duel with only two spells at his disposal.

The friends parted ways at the secret staircase. The Gray Lady helpfully appeared to inform George that Filch was patrolling the hallway near Ravenclaw Tower, so the first-year took a slightly different route back to his common room. By the time he made it up the five flights of stairs to the common room entrance, he was exhausted.

“*How do you know you are not dreaming right now?*” the knocker asked.

Because I’m bloody tired and my side hurts from where Dream knocked me on my arse too many times last night, George’s brain supplied.

“Your question assumes that there *is* a way to know, but there isn’t. I can’t prove that I am awake, just like I can’t prove that anything in this life is more than a figment of my imagination,” he said instead.

George didn’t even glance at his roommates’ beds when he finally made it up to their shared room. He only paused to brush his teeth and change his clothes. By the time he made it to his bed, he was so tired that he passed out the second his head hit the pillow.

~~~~~

When George woke up the next morning, his dormitory was deserted.

At first, the brunet thought he’d overslept. Panicking, he rolled over and checked his watch only to discover that it wasn’t even seven in the morning.

That was strange. Eret didn’t usually wake up until a quarter before eight.

George felt a sense of foreboding as he donned his school robes. It was quiet in the common room when the shorter boy descended the staircase that led up to the boys’ turrets; not even Philza, who could usually be found studying near the statue of Rowena Ravenclaw in the mornings, was present. Only a single older girl was in the back of the common room, sound asleep on top of her



textbooks, presumably having stayed up all night studying.

Something was definitely off.

George hurried down to the Great Hall, thinking that perhaps his roommates had all woken up early for breakfast. Alas, a cursory glance at the Ravenclaw table did not reveal a single fellow Ravenclaw first-year.

Unsettled, George walked over to the Slytherin table hesitantly. To his relief, he spotted Dream sitting across from Schlatt at the far end. Minx shot him a glare as he passed by, muttering something under her breath.

“Hey, George,” Dream said, surprised to see his friend approaching their table. “What’s up?”

“Tired of sitting with the Ravenclaw know-it-alls?” Schlatt joked.

George worried his bottom lip between his teeth and took a seat next to his best friend. Dream, sensing something was wrong, shot George a concerned look.

“You alright, George? What’s wrong?” he asked the shorter boy.

George sighed before answering. “When I woke up this morning, Eret, Wilbur, and Techno were all gone. They’re not at breakfast, either.”

Schlatt shrugged. “Why are you worrying about it? Maybe they decided to have an early-morning study sesh. You blue people are weird like that.”

George shook his head, thinking. “No, Eret never wakes up before me.”

Dream glanced over at the Ravenclaw table. “Well, if they’re not at breakfast, Schlatt’s probably right. I wouldn’t overthink it, Gogi.”

Schlatt snorted, causing pumpkin juice to come out of his nose. “Did you just call him *Gogi* ?”

George buried his head in his hands to hide his blush. “ *Dream.* ”

Dream chuckled at his best friend’s embarrassment. “It’s alright, George. We have History of Magic in ten minutes, so we can walk to class together. I’m sure your fellow nerds will be there.”

~~~~~

George’s fellow nerds were not, in fact, there.

George could barely concentrate on Professor Binns’ lecture on the Werewolf Code of Conduct because he was so preoccupied with his anxious thoughts. Thinking about it, he couldn’t recall seeing any of his roommates in their room the night before. He had been so exhausted after his midnight escapade that he hadn’t even bothered to check on the other boys.

He had a sneaking suspicion that his classmates’ absence had something to do with Techno’s failure to show up to the duel.

Dream didn’t seem concerned. George’s best friend was doodling stick figures in the margins of

his notes, not even pretending to pay attention to their professor.

Let's stop by the library before DADA , George scrawled on a scrap of parchment before passing the note to Dream. Dream read it quickly, face unmoving as he wrote a reply.

Ok Gogi, the note said in Dream's messy scrawl.

George rolled his eyes and drew an angry face on one of the stickmen. Dream smiled and replaced the doodle's eyes with hearts.

Five minutes before the end of class, two boys in robes lined with blue entered the classroom. George's eyes widened.

"Sorry, Professor Binns," Wilbur muttered, placing a late pass on the professor's desk.

"That's alright, Mr. Wilson and Mr. Eric. Take your seats," the ghostly man replied, completely butchering the first-years' names.

Wilbur and Eret sat down. George noted that Techno was not with them.

George ran up to his roommates as soon as class was over. His Housemates both had dark circles under their eyes, which only made George more worried.

"Wilbur! Eret! What happened to you? I woke up this morning and you were *gone* and I thought maybe—"

"*George*. Not here, please," Wilbur interrupted, glancing around the room at their classmates. "We have a free period now, yeah? Let's go to the library."

George nodded, eyes wide. The four first-years exited the History of Magic classroom and ascended one of the smaller marble staircases up to the third floor. Once in the library, they headed straight for the table in the very far corner of the room.

"Okay. What's going on?" George demanded once the boys were all seated. Even Dream looked concerned despite how dismissive the blond had been of George's worries earlier.

"Right. You know how Techno never showed up last night?" Eret asked, looking at Dream intently. "Well, that's because he was attacked on his way to the courtyard."

George gasped, hands flying to his mouth. "Attacked? What do you mean, *attacked*?"

Wilbur grimaced and began to explain. "After you left to meet up with Dream, Eret and I offered to escort him to his duel. But Techno, being the stubborn git that he is, told us he didn't want us coming along. So he left. But then *this* son of a bludger—" Wilbur paused to point at Eret "—decided he just *had* to follow, which meant that *I* then had to follow to make sure he didn't get lost. So then—"

"Where does the attack part come in?" Dream butted in impatiently.

"Just *listen* . The Gray Lady told us that Techno had taken a back staircase, so Eret and I naturally did the same thing. Eret ran down the stairs like a *madman* , but stopped short at the bottom and made a face like he'd just seen a Dementor. So then *I* looked down and saw Techno passed out cold on the floor in a puddle of blood, a cloaked figure hunched over him all creepy-like."

"A puddle of *blood* ?" George asked, horrified.

“Who was the figure?” Dream demanded, eyes focused intently on Wilbur.

“That’s the thing,” Eret said. “The attacker noticed us standing there and hit us both with some sort of stunning spell before we could tell who it was. Everything went black after that, and next thing I know I’m waking up next to Wilbur in the Hospital Wing.”

“That’s...actually insane,” Dream said.

“Is Techno okay? You said he was *bleeding*,” George asked, scared for his roommate.

“Madame Abbott said there was a nasty slash on his arm, but she healed that up right quick,” Wilbur stated. “The bigger problem is the fact that he’s still unconscious.”

“If he was stunned, though, he should be awake by now,” Dream muttered, brows furrowed in thought.

“McGonagall told us to keep quiet about the incident until they sort everything out, but come *on*. It’s Techno. Of *course* we had to tell you two,” Wilbur said.

“Plus, Techno wouldn’t want you thinking he backed out of the duel on purpose,” Eret added.

Dream ran a hand through his hair. “I guess you *were* right about that, George. I should have known Techno wouldn’t have ditched like that. He might be a jerk, but he’s not a liar,” the blond said with a sigh.

“Of course I was right. Ravenclaw, remember?” George said, tapping his head and earning himself an elbow to the ribs from his best friend. “In all seriousness, though, d’you think it was a student, Wilbur? I can’t imagine anyone at Hogwarts wanting to hurt Techno.”

“No clue, honestly. DADA starts soon, so we should get going. Mum’s the word, yeah?” Wilbur asked, gaze flicking from Dream to George seriously.

“Of course,” George promised.

“Yeah,” Dream nodded, “swear on my wand.”

For once, George was one of the students struggling to pay attention in class for the rest of the day. All of his thoughts kept returning to Techno, unconscious in the Hospital Wing. He couldn’t fathom why anyone would want to attack the boy. His roommate was generally well-respected among the other first-years and was an excellent student.

One thing scared George immensely: the victim could have easily been him. Had he left the common room mere moments later than he had, it might have been *him* lying in a pool of his own blood. The thought was terrifying.

“You know,” Dream said to him after their Potions class, “this thing with Techno sounds kind of... off.”

“Off how?” George asked curiously.

“I don’t know,” Dream answered, “it’s just so random. My dad used to tell me stories about how messed up things were at Hogwarts during the war. There were all sorts of dark wizards infiltrating the castle all the time and crazy death-snakes coming out of secret chambers. Kids used to just drop *dead* in the halls, George, but that stuff is supposed to be over now.”

“Do you think this attack has anything to do with the war?” George questioned. As a Muggle-born, he wasn’t well-versed in all of the specific details of the wizarding conflicts. Professor Binns had briefly discussed the First and Second Wizarding Wars in their History of Magic class, but George hadn’t grown up with the knowledge like Dream had.

Dream frowned and pursed his lips. “I hope not. If this *was* some sort of political thing, it was a pretty stupid one. Going after some random first-year’s kinda dumb. Plus,” Dream added in a quieter tone, “I definitely don’t need even *more* people thinking that *Clay Selwyn the Slytherin pureblood kid* is a crazy racist Death Eater.”

“Don’t even start, Dream,” George chided gently. He didn’t need Dream getting himself into one of his grumpy moods again when everyone was already on edge.

“Okay, Gogi. Gotta drop my books off. See you at dinner?”

“Sure.”

With that, the boys parted ways, Dream heading down to the dungeons and George climbing up the staircase that led to Ravenclaw Tower.

It was strange, saying goodnight to two boys instead of three that night. As George drifted off to sleep, he couldn’t stop replaying what Wilbur had told them in the library.

Though he wanted to believe Techno’s attack was a one-off occurrence, George couldn’t shake the feeling that this incident was the beginning of something much bigger.

Chapter End Notes

What did y'all think? I am going to be picking up the pace soon cuz the first year is kind of boring and I want to write more advanced magic. As always, comments are much appreciated! I love your awesome ideas. Next update will probably come out by the end of this weekend!

Chapter Five || Year One

Chapter Summary

Techno wakes up.

Chapter Notes

HELLO! If this chapter seems a million times better than the other ones, that is because Gra55 is a fantastic editor and SUPER super amazing at characterization! Go check out their work!

IMPORTANT NOTE: In light of the latest MCC, Karl is now a Hufflepuff. I have edited the previous chapters to reflect this. It is a very minor change.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

An unfortunate incident, Headmistress McGonagall had called it at the Halloween Feast.

After an entire week had passed since Techno's attack, the Hogwarts staff *finally* decided to address the first-year's prolonged absence from his classes. Almost everyone in their year had been wondering where the Ravenclaw had gone, but, true to their words, George and Dream had told no one of the assault on their classmate.

McGonagall's voice had been stern when she addressed the Hogwarts student body before dinner. "Last week an unfortunate incident left one of our first-year students in the Hospital Wing. The student is recovering under the care of our matron, Madame Abbott, who determined that he was hit with an unidentified splash potion. On behalf of all Hogwarts staff, I would like to remind you all that bullying is childish behavior that will *not* be tolerated at this school under any circumstances and will be met with *severe* punishment."

"*Bullying*?" Wilbur whispered. "*That's* what they're going with?"

"Please be informed that curfew is in place for a reason. This incident is not a cause for panic. Do not let any circulating misinformation distract you from your approaching end-of-term examinations."

With those final words ringing in their ears, the students in the Great Hall began eating. The festive Halloween atmosphere combined with the wide array of seasonal delicacies quickly distracted most of the student body. Soon, only a few students could be heard gossiping about McGonagall's announcement.

"D'you reckon they're right about the splash potion?" Eret asked Wilbur.

"I dunno. Slughorn hasn't taught us anything about splash potions yet."

George nodded, glancing up as he felt a nudge on his shoulder.

"Scoot over," Dream demanded, motioning for the shorter boy to make room for him at their table, "and what's all this about Slughorn?" he asked, snagging a baked potato from a nearby serving dish before plopping down into his newfound seat and shoving the entire thing in his mouth.

Wilbur wrinkled his nose at the Slytherin's table manners, "We're talking about splash potions. I said Slughorn hasn't even covered them in class yet."

Dream chewed his food thoughtfully and nodded, "I can't believe they're calling it *bullying*. As if anyone would want to bully Techno." he rolled his eyes, swallowing, "There's no way anyone's gonna believe that."

"The word 'bullying' is ridiculous." George snorted, "This was more like...attempted murder!"

"That's what *I* was thinking! It must've been one powerful splash potion for Techno to still be out cold," Wilbur mused, "Definitely too big to just be bullying."

"So the two options are either bullying or murder?" Eret asked through a mouthful of pumpkin pasty.

Dream shrugged, "That's Hogwarts."

George quirked his eyebrows at the strange comment before his eyes suddenly widened in realization, "Oh no. The term's nearly over and Techno's going to be so behind on exam preparation!"

Dream paused mid chew and looked at George in disbelief. "*Really? That's* what you're worried about?! Gosh, you really *are* a nerd."

"Just because I think it's good to be prepared for exams?"

"No, 'cuz your roommate is still *knocked out* and you're worried about him failing some stupid tests!"

George crossed his arms defensively. "Hey, exams are stressful! I think if I study for at *least* an hour a day, I should be prepared by December..."

"Oh come on, George." Dream scoffed, "Exams are more than a month away. Plus," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "there's no way I'm letting you study tomorrow."

"Why not?" George asked, puzzled.

"Because I'm not going to let you spend your birthday *studying*," Dream teased, elbowing his friend in the ribs.

At Dream's words, Eret and Wilbur both turned sharply to look at George, who could feel his face heating up as he rubbed his side painfully. He shot an irritated glare at Dream, who pretended to be focused on the meat pie in his hand.

"*Birthday*?! George, why didn't you say anything?!" Eret asked incredulously.

"Yeah, mate, you could have told us," Wilbur added.

"I-I dunno!" He stammered, "Honestly, I kinda forgot. There's just been a lot going on lately, and with Techno in the Hospital Wing...I don't really need the attention," he admitted, averting his gaze.

Wilbur's expression softened and he let out a small chuckle, reaching over the table to clap him on the shoulder. "Come on now, George. I'm sure Techno wouldn't mind us celebrating your *birthday*. Sure, he likes attention, but only when he's doing *cool* stuff. Being unconscious is not considered 'cool' in his books."

"Yeah, he'd probably want you to have an *extra* big party to distract from the fact that he's out cold." Eret added.

"I mean, *maybe*." George shrugged, "There isn't much to celebrate anyways though, I don't expect presents or anything. I mean, I recently found out I can do *real magic*! I think that counts as enough birthday presents until I *graduate*. Just being at Hogwarts is the best present I could ever ask for."

"Awww, Georgie!" Dream teased. "Are *we* your birthday presents?"

George rolled his eyes and buried his head in his hands. "Never mind," he grumbled. "I hate you all. I expect special presents from *everyone*."

"We love you too, Gogi!"

"*Dream!* Don't call me that!"

~~~~~

On the morning of his twelfth birthday, George just managed to escape the 'Happy Birthday!'s his roommates threw at him. Tiptoeing out of their shared bedroom before any of them could make a huge fuss over him. He shut the door to the boys dorms quietly behind him and let out a sigh of relief.

"Happy Birthday George!"

"Wah—! Dream?!" George exclaimed, nearly jumping a mile high as the birthday greeting was called. He whirled around to face the Slytherin, who had a flimsy birthday hat clinging onto his head through sheer willpower, and maybe some sort of hat gluing spell.

"Surprise!" Dream grinned, holding out a blue frosted cupcake with an unlit yellow candle poking out the top.

"How did you even get in?" George asked incredulously, ignoring the pastry, "You didn't *actually* answer the riddle, right?"

"Duh, of course I did," Dream scoffed, placing the cupcake on a nearby table, "It's not like it's hard or anything."

"Yeah, he may have gotten some help too, but that's fine," Philza called out from an armchair in the corner, not bothering to glance up from the book he was reading.

"Or I *may* have done it all by myself."

"You definitely did that thirty minutes of screaming at the doorknob all by yourself," Philza snickered, turning a page.

Dream glared at the prefect, sticking his tongue out before untucking a cardboard box from underneath his arm and holding it out to George.

"I didn't have time to wrap it or anything, so that's why it looks bad," Dream explained, "but the

stuff inside still looks great!”

George grinned and shuffled over, lifting the lid up excitedly. Inside the box were two books: a copy of *Hogwarts: A History* and another book titled *Sites of Historical Sorcery* .

“I think they’re kinda lame, but you mentioned you wanted to know more about wizard history ‘n stuff so..... I hope you like ‘em.”

George smiled and tucked the box safely under his arm. “I love it, Dream. Thank you,” he said honestly.

Dream let out a sigh of relief, “Good, I should’ve known you were a huge nerd and would’ve been happy with these dumb books, but just in case I had Bad teach me something after dinner last night.”

“What is it?” George asked as Dream pulled his wand out from the sleeve of his robe.

“You’ll see, watch this,” he said excitedly, turning towards the cupcake on the table.

“Try not to blow up my common room, yeah?” Philza piped up, still fully immersed in his book.

“I *won’t* !” Dream cried, “I’m a *professional* , okay?”

“Sure.”

Dream pursed his lips in irritation before refocusing his attention on the yellow candle. He rolled his wrist in small circles a couple of times and rehearsed the incantation under his breath, “Alright, I’m ready, are you ready?”

George nodded, staring intently at the wick.

“*Incendio* !” the blond declared, flicking his wrist ever so slightly. A few yellow sparks shot out, but the candle remained unlit.

“*Ugh* . I thought I had it for sure!”

“*Incendio* !” Phil called from the other side of the common room, instantly lighting the candle without ever looking up from the book.

“Dude! I was gonna try again! You’re such a show off,” Dream groaned.

“Whoops, at least the common room’s safe now. You looked like you were gonna set the table on fire.”

“You weren’t even looking,” Dream mumbled under his breath, “Whatever. Make a wish, George!”

George laughed and closed his eyes. *Please let Techno get well soon*, he thought before blowing out the candle.

~~~~~

Techno woke up two weeks after George’s birthday.

George, Wilbur, and Eret had been proofreading each others’ Transfiguration assignments in the Ravenclaw common room one evening after dinner. Professor Winger had given them only a week

to write two rolls of parchment on the practical applications of the transfiguration formula, and everyone (except Dream, who'd called George a nerd when he'd invited the blond to their group study session) was struggling to finish in time.

That was why no one noticed their fourth roommate casually walking up to their table until he loudly cleared his throat.

The three boys looked up and froze in shock.

Techno looked pale and disheveled and smugger than ever, grinning at his friends' astonished expressions. "How's it goin'?"

The greeting snapped the boys out of their trances.

"Techno!" They all exclaimed in unison, jumping up to embrace their friend.

"You're alive!"

"Are you alright?"

"Welcome back!"

"Alright, I'm tappin' out guys," Techno coughed out, slapping at the smothering trio's grip before he passed out again, "Are you tryna put me back in the infirmary?"

The three jumped back instantly and Techno collapsed to the ground, holding his hand up to stop them before they could offer their support.

"Please, you've already done...so much." He winced, clambering back to his feet and plopping down into one of their empty chairs.

"First day back and you're already taking my stuff, huh?" Wilbur crossed his arms and rolled his eyes dramatically, "Incredibly rude."

"What, were you just gonna let me stand there? What a gentleman. This must be that British hospitality everyone's always talkin' about. Was the attempt on my life part of protocol or was that just like a fun little bonus?"

"That... was a bit off script." Wilbur muttered, chewing his bottom lip nervously, "But while we're already on the subject, what exactly *did* happen to you?"

"Yeah, who attacked you?" George piped in.

"Did you manage to fight back?" Eret asked.

"Oh! Were they a first-year?"

"What'd they hit you with?"

"How did they even manage to get you?"

"Was it just the one person Wilbur and I saw over you or were there more before?"

"Gentlemen, please, one at a time." Wilbur cut in, waving his hands up and down to silence them.

"Oh, oops. Sorry." Eret apologized as George nodded in agreement.

"S'fine, I just woke up, like, this morning." Techno sighed, running his a hand through his thin brown hair, "Not that I wasn't expectin' all this questionin', but McGonagall already interrogated me and the truth is I really don't remember much."

"That's alright, chap, we're just glad you're okay." Wilbur grinned, placing a hand on his shoulder, George and Eret nodding along.

"We were all really worried," George added, twisting his fingers through the hem of his robes nervously, "You were in the Hospital Wing for such a long time, it was starting to look pretty bad."

"Psh, not even close," Techno waved him off with a smirk, "It would take a lot more than *that* to get rid of me."

The comment was so *Techno* that George couldn't help but laugh.

"So what exactly *was* 'that'?" Wilbur asked, putting the word in quotes, "Not to be another McGonagall but I'm sure you remember *something*, so..."

"Yeah, I get it, you wanna know all those juicy details." Techno huffed, "The gist of it is that I was on my way to beat Selwyn in the courtyard when I heard footsteps. Thought Eret was followin' me, so I turned around to give him a piece of my mind when someone in dark robes threw a splash potion at my feet. I was out like a light after that."

Wilbur let out a satisfied hum, "Yeah, I figured as much. McGonagall told us about the whole splash potion thing but I wasn't sure if it was true."

"Wilbur and I were lucky that the attacker only stunned us," Eret added with a shiver, "we haven't even started learning the first thing about splash potions! Whoever it was could've *definitely* dealt more damage."

Techno nodded, his eyes drifting to look out the window. "That's not even the worst of it, it took them *seven doses* of Wiggensweld potion to finally get me up," he informed the boys. "Madame Abbott said that she couldn't be certain, but Professor Slughorn thinks I was hit with a modified Draught of Living Death."

Wilbur gasped, clamping a hand over his mouth as Eret stared at Techno in shock.

"You can't be serious." Wilbur insisted.

"What's a Draught of Living Death?" George asked hesitantly.

"Oh, it's only the most *powerful sleeping potion in existence* !" Eret exclaimed, throwing his hands up, "Why anyone who's powerful enough to make it would waste a potion like that on Techno is *beyond* me."

"Well that's *rude*." Techno scoffed, propping his legs up on the table, "Obviously it's cuz they didn't stand a chance against me."

~~~~~

The rest of the term passed quickly after Techno woke up.

Things more or less returned to normal at Hogwarts. Techno had informed his roommates that his attack was still under "investigation" so the boys didn't discuss the incident in the open. The only exception to the rule was Dream, whom George had instantly filled in on the events the day they

were told to him.

“You can’t tell anyone about this though, okay?” George stressed, “I’m not even sure if I’m supposed to share this with *you*.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell a soul,” Dream nodded solemnly, holding his hand up in a vow.

“Good.”

As the days went by, the conflict between Dream and Techno hadn’t gone down by so much as a hair’s breadth. The two were cold towards each other whenever they were in the same room, hardly looking at each other save for the odd glare. George wished that his two friends would make up already, but neither boy seemed interested in mentioning the ill-fated duel, so he didn’t press the matter.

End-of-term assessments took place during the second week of December, and in the days leading up to it the library had practically become a second home to George. Each meal was a battle between Dream and George’s grip on his textbook, not that the Slytherin had much room to talk.

From the way that he had begun studying, you’d think the boy had turned into a Ravenclaw overnight, memorizing dates and spells off of homemade flashcards, and staying late after classes to ask his teachers extra questions. Of course, he’d never let any of his friends find out about his new study habits or he was sure he’d die of shame.

Oh, and if George thought that the days leading *up* to the exam were terrible, then exam week *itself* was akin to literal hell. Not a single soul got more than three total hours of sleep each night, so everyone was more irritable than usual. If you had the misfortune of bumping into someone in the hallways, chances were you were gonna get thrown off the nearest moving staircase and into the abyss.

Nevertheless, by the end of it all George was certain that he had aced Charms, Transfiguration, Astronomy, and DADA. His flying exam had gone alright up until he’d fallen off his broom at the very end, but he hoped he wouldn’t lose too many points for the mishap. The Potions and Herbology exams on the other hand...well, George wasn’t planning on becoming a potioneer anyways, and plants just sucked in general, so he supposed it didn’t really matter either way.

The final exam was their History of Magic assessment. George was confident he did fairly well despite the fact that he’d forgotten what year Emeric the Evil was killed. As soon as Professor Binns had collected their papers, George was jumping out of his chair and rushing over to Dream’s desk.

“We did it, Dream! It’s finally the end of term!” He cried joyfully. Dream smiled at his best friend’s happiness, but the smile looked forced.

“Hooray,” He whooped dryly, “I get to go home for Christmas and spend time with my family. Awesome.”

George’s gaze softened and his shoulders sagged at his friend’s words. “C’mon, I’m sure it won’t be so bad. It’ll be nice to see your mum and Drista again, right?”

“Yeah, I guess” he huffed, glancing guiltily at the floor.

“Plus, I’m right next door! You can always come over to my house!”

Dream brightened at that, then seemed to realize something and facepalmed. “Wait, the train takes

us to London tomorrow, right?"

"Erm, yeah? That's how the end of the term works." George replied, raising an eyebrow in his friend's direction.

"So I should probably start packing then, right?"

"Wh—? *Start* packing?!" George spluttered, "The train leaves *tomorrow morning!* "

"Oh, relax. I'll get it done." Dream shrugged, waving him off.

George shook his head in disbelief. "You really *are* an idiot."

"Maybe, but you still love me."

~~~~~

Seeing his parents again had been wonderful, but George was happy when the holidays were over and he got to return to the castle. He and Dream had barely even seen each other over the break despite being next door neighbors, and George was excited to finally be able to spend time with his best friend again.

The shorter boy's eyes stayed glued to the window throughout the entire train ride, eagerly waiting to catch a glimpse of his new favorite place in the world. When the faint outline of the castle was *finally* visible, George squealed, earning him an amused look from Dream.

"I didn't know Hogwarts installed an alarm system for when the train got close," Dream chuckled, but even *he* couldn't keep the excitement from his voice.

"Oh shut up, you should be thankful for my alarm services."

Stepping onto the castle grounds felt rejuvenating. The very *air* was rich with magical energy; George could feel the magic envelop him as he entered the castle. Sure, the mood was kind of killed once Peeves jump scared him on his way up to Ravenclaw Tower, but George couldn't bring himself to be angry about it.

It was good to be home.

~~~~~

The remainder of George's first year at Hogwarts flew by.

Without his friend being half dead on a hospital bed, the days just didn't seem to drag on as long as they had during the first term.

With Techno alive and well, the first-years fell back into their routines. George threw himself eagerly back into his studies, while spending the afternoons after his classes hanging out with Dream, exploring the castle and playing gobstones in the courtyard. His evenings were spent in the Ravenclaw common room, studying with his roommates and nodding sympathetically as Philza complained about how grueling O.W.L. preparations were.

"I'm not one to turn my nose up at big projects, ya know, I like em all well enough," he'd say. "But only when it's something interestin, doin stuff I don't like just doesn't suit me. 'S just annoyin that half the good jobs require ya to pass borin classes."

During meals, George found himself spending more and more time at the Hufflepuff table than at his own. Bad was always happy to make room for anyone who wanted to join, the second-year had to be the most genuine person he'd ever met, and it was really exciting for him to get to know Karl. He hadn't known that the Hufflepuff from his transfiguration classes was also a complete Muggle-born, so it was nice to not be the only one out of the loop anymore.

"I can't believe it's already almost *May*," Eret sighed one day during lunch in the Great Hall. "I feel like the term just *started*!"

"Wh—?! *May*?! " George cried, nearly choking on his food as his utensils clattered onto the plate, "You're *joking*. There's no way it's almost May."

"Be careful there," Wilbur chuckled, slapping him on the back as he fell into a coughing fit, "Don't get too excited, we'll be having more exams soon."

"*Noooo* don't remind me," Eret groaned, banging his forehead against the table in defeat, "I was just getting excited for summer."

"Seriously, I hate studying," Dream huffed, earning an eye roll from George.

"I *still* can't believe you got better marks than me on your last History of Magic assessment. You don't even take *notes* for that class!" George exclaimed.

"What can I say? I'm just really smart," he said with a shrug.

"More like really lucky," George grumbled, "all these teachers must *love* you."

~~~~~

"Professor Chang hates me."

George, Wilbur and Eret all looked up from their work in time to see Dream march towards them and dump his textbooks on their library table. With only two weeks until their end-of-year examinations, the boys practically *lived* in the library.

"Why do you say that, Dream?" George asked as he scooted over, a bit concerned by the way the blond immediately buried his head in his hands upon sitting down.

Dream laughed humorlessly in response. "Are you kidding? You've *seen* the way she looks at me in class."

"I haven't noticed anything strange about the way she looks at you," George answered, brows furrowing in thought.

At this, Eret shot George a look. "Even *I* can see that Selwyn's right. She looks at him like he's the scum of the earth."

Dream tensed at the use of his surname, but didn't comment on it, for once.

"Exactly," Dream muttered. "And it *sucks* because I actually like her class and I didn't even *do* anything to her. Just now I stayed behind to ask her a question about the exams, and she acted like I was *wasting* her time. Answering my questions is her entire freaking job!"

"Maybe it's because you didn't turn in your werewolf essay on time?" George suggested, trying to be helpful.

“Schlatt didn’t turn it in either, but I didn’t see Chang giving *him* any death glares,” Dream huffed.

Wilbur tapped his wand against his chin thoughtfully, “I mean, it probably has something to do with your family. Your uncle *did* kidnap and torture tons of her friends during the war, you know.”

George shot his Housemate a warning look, but Wilbur ignored it, carrying on.

"You should tell her off about it, mate. I mean, I *get* it, but it isn’t right. She's judging you based on something you weren't even involved in. It's not *your* fault your family is evil—”

“Wilbur! Stop it!” George snapped, slamming his fists against the table as Dream stared at the floor in silence.

The curly haired boy winced, glanced between his roommate and the Slytherin with an apologetic look, "I— I didn't mean it like that. I'm sorry."

After what felt like an eternity the blond finally huffed, “Whatever, I don’t need the help of any stupid professors, anyway.”

Dream stood up from the table, grabbing his textbooks before storming out.

“Dream, wait—!”

“It’s fine! I just wanna be left alone right now!”

With that, Dream disappeared behind the bookshelves, the sound of a door slamming echoed through the room a few moments later, announcing his departure.

Wilbur opened his mouth to say something, but thought better of it, clamping his jaw shut as his face contorted into a guilty expression. The table stayed silent after that, a pit of unease settling in George’s stomach.

~~~~~

A week before his first exam, George was getting ready to get some early-morning studying done in the common room when he heard a group of girls in his year whispering to each other.

“Did you hear the news?” one of the girls asked her Housemates.

“What news?”

“Some Hufflepuff kid was attacked last night on his way back from the Astronomy Tower! I overheard one of their prefects telling Philza about it when I came downstairs.”

George’s stomach dropped and the quill in his hand froze, a sick feeling of déjà-vu clouding his thoughts. The girls kept gossiping.

“*Attacked ?!*”

“Yeah. Filch’s cat found him unconscious on the floor. Someone hit him with a stunning spell, apparently.”

A stunning spell. Eret’s words from months earlier rang out in George’s head. *Wilbur and I were lucky that the attacker only stunned us.*

George didn't bother staying to hear the rest of what the girls were saying. He quickly gathered his books and left Ravenclaw Tower, descending the spiral staircase two steps at a time. The faces in the portraits lining the halls stared at him as he passed by, their eyes following his hurried movements. His pace didn't slow down until he was finally facing the door to the Hospital Wing.

George gulped, his heart pounding from the race to the hospital tower. He reached out and gripped the door handle, muttering a silent prayer that nobody he knew would be there before throwing the doors open.

His eyes scanned the empty beds lining the walls, a small gasp escaping his lips as they landed on a familiar figure in yellow-lined robes.

"I'll be with you in just a minute!" a voice — Madame Abbott, George presumed — called out from around a corner.

George ignored her, taking a few tentative steps towards the first-year's bed before noticing that the boy's eyes were closed. He hesitated, not wanting to wake the sleeping Hufflepuff, but before he could turn back around and leave a pair of tired green eyes blinked open and met his own.

"Uh, hi Karl," George whispered nervously, not knowing what else to say.

Karl furrowed his brows, blinking in confusion as he slowly turned his head to assess his surroundings.

"A-are you okay?" He asked gently, reaching his hand out to comfort the boy.

"Um, I *think* so." He replied, gradually sitting up, "I'm in the hospital wing though so maybe not."

"That—"

"Oh wait! I remember now!" He exclaimed, "That hurt like crazy, you came to check on me, right?"

"Y-yeah, I overheard what happened last night and I wanted to make sure that you—"

"Excuse me, young man!" a stern voice interrupted from behind. George winced, turning around slowly to meet the disapproving face of Madame Abbott. "It's a bit early for visitors, don't you think? Mr. Jacobs has had a *very* stressful night, it would be best if you hurried on to breakfast."

"Yes, I-I was just...er, sorry," George stammered, making to leave.

"Wait, George! Don't go! I'm alright," Karl called out.

"Mr. Jacobs, you are still recovering from that laceration. I do not think that—"

"*Please?* I feel *fine*," Karl whined.

Madame Abbott pinched the bridge of her nose, letting out a sigh of exasperation. "If you start making any sort of noise I'll have *both* of you removed from this place, am I understood?"

"Yes ma'am." Karl nodded, raising his arm in a salute before wincing as his injury made itself known.

She sighed one more time, giving them a final irritated glare before disappearing behind the corner once more. With their matron out of ear shot, George took a seat next to his classmate's cot.

“So, what do you remember?” George asked intently as Karl rubbed at the newly-formed scar on his arm.

“Oh, it was crazy! Our class had just finished Astronomy, right? And so I stayed behind to ask Professor Sinistra if we would need to study *all* forty-eight of Ptolemy’s constellations for the exam—”

“Oh! I needed to know that too! What’d she say?”

“She said we do,” Karl groaned, “I’m gonna need you to help me with that by the way— but that’s not important! I was on my way back to the common room when this flash of red light went flying over my shoulder!”

“A stunning spell?” George asked.

“Exactly! Whoever cast it missed their first shot and I totally freaked out! I was like ‘What the honk?! Who did that!’ and then I spun around and there was *another* flash of light right in front of my face! It was insane, my arm was bleeding all over the place and I couldn’t see anything, I thought I was dead for *sure*!” Karl said with a shudder.

“And then what happened?” George asked with wide eyes.

“Well obviously I was totally freaked! I screamed like my head fell off or something and turned to run away, but before I could even take five steps they hit me with another shot! I blacked out completely after that, and next thing I know I wake up here!” Karl cried, throwing his arms up as he gestured to the hospital wing before wincing at his injury.

“That’s *insane*.” George murmured, the gears in his head turning as he processed all the new information. Karl’s story sounded eerily familiar, and the glaring similarities between his attack and Techno’s filled George with a creeping sense of dread.

“Right? I was scared out of my mind! It’s a good thing someone found me.”

“It really is, I’m glad you’re alright Karl.”

“Same, it would really suck if I wasn’t, otherwise I would miss out on a ton of stuff here!”

George nodded, “Are you coming to the Great Hall for breakfast? Your Housemates are probably worried sick about you.”

As if on cue, the door to the infirmary flew open with a bang, a frazzled looking Bad leaping from the entrance and rushing over to Karl’s bedside.

“KARL, YOU MUFFIN!” he exclaimed, pushing George out of the way in his frenzy. “I waited up for you in the common room for *hours*, but you never came back from Astronomy! Then Lucinda returned from her prefect patrol and told me you were in the *Hospital Wing*! Are you okay? What happened?!”

The commotion caused Madame Abbott to peek her head around the corner and silence them with an irritated *shhhhh*.

“I’m sorry, but it totally wasn’t my fault!” Karl exclaimed.

“Of course it wasn’t your fault you *muffinhead* ! You got hurt from something!”



“Yeah! I was just telling George about it. Some crazy person slashed my arm open and then knocked me out in the hallway! Madame Abbott did a really good job healing it up, but it still hurts a little when I move my arm too fast.”

“Wait, George is here?” Bad asked, his head snapping in his direction. “Oh my goodness, I didn’t even notice you there! I’m glad someone else came to check up on Karl.”

“It’s fine, you were just really worried,” George replied, “I’m gonna head to breakfast, will I see you if I stop by the Hufflepuff table later?”

“Honk yeah you will! There’s no *way* I’m staying in this bed all day,” Karl declared. “I’m *starving* .”

George chuckled and left the two Hufflepuffs to their devices, making a beeline for the Great Hall. There was something fishy about that attack, of that he was sure, and he was going to get to the bottom of it.

## Chapter End Notes

According to AO3 statistics, only a small percentage of readers actually leave kudos. If you enjoyed this chapter, please consider leaving kudos and a comment. It's free!

I hope y'all liked the update! Things are heating up ^\_^ Once again, thank you so much Gra55 for all your help. GO CHECK THEM OUT!

## Chapter Six || Year One

### Chapter Summary

George's first year at Hogwarts comes to a close.

### Chapter Notes

Hello again! We're back with another chapter :D would've uploaded sooner but real life got in the way, unfortunately. I can't believe this story is currently up to 5000+ hits!!! I've never had that many people read anything of mine before, and all of your comments make me so happy :DDDD

Once again, a big thank you to Gra55 for their fantabulous editing. So much love to them <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Dream,” George whispered to his friend during their Potions lesson as he counted out exactly four mistletoe berries for their Forgetfulness Potion. “I need to tell you something important. Meet me in the library after this class?”

“Sounds good. Can you pass me the Valerian sprigs?” Dream replied dismissively, gesturing towards the ingredients spread out on their desk.

George huffed, carefully handing him the plant, which Dream immediately tossed into their cauldron with a splash.

“*Dream* ! You can’t just throw stuff in there! That’s too many!”

“Relax, it’s fine, I’m paying attention! If I put in double the amount it should be finished in half the time, right? C’mon, George, you’re supposed to be the genius here, this is basic math.”

“That’s *not* how math works, and you’re *supposed* to be stirring clockwise, not counter-clockwise!”

“I *am* stirring clockwise.”

“Do you even know what a clock looks like, you idiot?”

“Sure I do, it’s the thing that tells the weather.” Dream replied, rolling his eyes.

“Absolutely not, you’re joking, move over, you’re not touching another *drop* of this potion.” He pushed Dream aside, staring in exasperation at the bubbling abomination before him.

“Hey! I was doing good!” Dream whined, crossing his arms. He glanced down at his potion covered wand and then glanced up at George, slowly moving the wand to his mouth.

“Don’t you *dare* try eating that.”

George spent the remainder of their Potions class trying in vain to salvage their ruined potion while Dream loomed over his shoulder unhelpfully. When only five minutes remained until the end of the period, Professor Slughorn walked up to their work station and physically cringed upon seeing the contents of their cauldron.

“Gentlemen, it appears that your potion is an unsightly shade of olive green. Forgetfulness potions are supposed to be bright orange... *how* did you accomplish such a feat?” their Professor asked incredulously, sounding equal parts horrified and genuinely curious.

“Well, Professor, um...I’m colorblind?” George squeaked, the excuse sounding feeble to his own ears.

“Be that as it may, Mr. Davidson, you will need to practice following basic instructions if you want to pass your upcoming practical examination. The same applies to you, Mr. Selwyn.”

Thankfully, Professor Slughorn didn’t actually make them consume their concoction, so the two boys made it to the library relatively unscathed, save the stern lecture Dream received from George the entire way there.

As soon as Dream plopped down at their favorite table in the corner, George switched gears, going from potion-making safety protocol to schoolwide conspiracy theories in a heartbeat.

“After that I just left him there and went to tell the other guys at breakfast.” He concluded, “But half of them weren’t even there, so I’ll have to hunt them down later.”

Dream nodded. “You know what’s weird? Techno’s arm was *also* slashed.” He pointed out.

“Exactly!” George exclaimed, “But what’s even *weirder* is that when Wilbur and Eret got attacked *they* weren’t physically injured, just stunned!”

“That’s true,” Dream hummed thoughtfully, “But... maybe that’s because they snuck up on that attacker? I mean, based on what you told me, Eret and Wilbur only found this person once they already slashed up Techno. Maybe they weren’t ready for them?”

“But ready for *what* exactly?” George asked.

Dream shrugged, “I have no clue....How much do you wanna bet they’re gonna call this another case of bullying?” he added with an eye roll. “As *if* a first-year *Hufflepuff* would have bullies. Karl is nice to literally everyone.”

“It *had* to have been the same person, then,” George asserted. “The attacks are too similar.”

Dream thought for a few moments, then shook his head. “I don’t know who would have a problem with both Techno *and* Karl, we can’t say anything for sure. Could be someone copying the original attack as well.”

The boys went silent, then, as they contemplated the recent incidents. George wanted to spend more time discussing the attacks with Dream, but soon the boys had to hurry off to their next classes. They agreed to have dinner together at the Ravenclaw table that evening.

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By the time dinner rolled around, George had already managed to catch up his roommates on the Karl situation in between their classes. The other boys seemed relieved when George informed them that Karl was only stunned by his attacker.

“I told ya, not everyone can handle a Draught of Livin’ Death. The attacker knew it’d take more than a stunnin’ spell to knock *me* down,” Techno had proclaimed smugly on their way to the Great Hall.

Wilbur rolled his eyes and elbowed him in the ribs, chuckling when Techno gasped dramatically and gave the other boy a shove, causing him to nearly trip over a grumbling fourth-year.

Muttering hasty apologies under their breaths, the boys scrambled over to their table where Dream already sat, waiting, chewing on a turkey leg as he reread the tenth chapter of their Transfiguration textbook. George gasped in horror as he lay his eyes on the greasy fingerprints all over the pages.

“*Dream* ! Oh my *god* you can’t just wipe your hands on the textbook!” he exclaimed, rushing to rescue the book from his friend.

Dream replied with something that sounded like a halfhearted apology, but George couldn’t make out the exact words through the blond’s full mouth.

“George told you about Karl, yeah?” Wilbur asked, nodding in Dream’s direction. The freckled boy nodded, swallowing his food.

“Sounded rough,” Dream replied. “A week before exams, too. Timing could have been better.”

Just then, McGonagall’s voice echoed throughout the Great Hall, silencing students and drawing all attention to the High Table.

“Good evening, students,” their headmistress began. “I am sure many of you are aware of the incident that occurred near the Astronomy Tower last night. For those of you who have not yet heard, there was an altercation in which one of our first-year students was stunned.”

George glanced over at the Hufflepuff table and spotted Karl, who’s head had perked up at the mention of his attack. A few of his housemates pat his back sympathetically as he muttered something, probably repeating the same phrase about being scared half to death.

“May you be reminded once more: bullying is childish behavior. With only one week remaining until your end-of-year examinations, the staff have decided to increase nightly prefect patrols in all areas of the castle. Anyone caught outside their common rooms after curfew will face severe consequences. That is all.”

As the students resumed eating dinner, Dream turned to George and whispered in his ear. “She said bullying again. I freaking *called* it.”

“You did,” George acknowledged with a nod. Whatever ‘bullying’ was going on at Hogwarts, one thing was certain: George didn’t want any part of it. The shorter boy couldn’t wait to return to the safety of Ravenclaw Tower, where he could curl up by the fire and study for his exams in peace. Oh, how he loved the Ravenclaw common room.

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Dream hated the Slytherin common room.

Well, perhaps hate was a strong word. The common room itself was nice, he supposed. It was a long, low, underground room with rough stone walls and a ceiling from which round, greenish lamps hung on silver chains. At the back of the room, a fire was always crackling under an elaborately carved mantelpiece, around which several Slytherins could usually be found silhouetted in carved chairs.

Their common room was very dark and very green. These features appealed to some students, just not to Dream.

Schlatt, for instance, loved their underground dungeon.

“Ah, sweet Slytherin!” Dream’s Housemate exclaimed as the boys entered. “Man, I love this place. Don’t you just love our great common room, Dream?”

“There’s no natural light,” the blond answered dismissively. “It’s kinda depressing.”

“Oh, don’t be like that. It’s more like...cool and mysterious,” Schlatt declared.

“Sure, if you like having a vitamin D deficiency.” He shrugged, “I’ll be in our dorm if you need me.”

“I’m comin’ with you, I gotta grab my Charms book anyway.”

The boys walked through the narrow passage that led off to the boys’ dormitories. Their other two roommates weren’t back from the Great Hall yet, and Dream was looking forward to getting first dibs on the shower. Before he could grab his towel and a change of clothes, however, a sharp squawk drew his attention to the head of his four poster bed.

There, perched on Dream’s headboard, was a small spotted brown owl with wide, unblinking black eyes. It held a thin white envelope in its beak, which it dropped on the bed as Dream approached.

“Hey, Dreamy, looks like you got a visitor. How’d you get in here, little guy?” Schlatt asked the bird while Dream picked up the letter.

“This is weird,” the taller boy muttered. “We never get mail delivered to us in our dorms. How did it even get in here?”

“Must be priority mail,” Schlatt said with a shrug, “First class or something.”

Dream frowned when he read the address line. The letters *C.E.A.S.II.* were scrawled on the front, barely legible. In spite of the hurried handwriting, Dream recognized the initials instantly; they were only one character away from his own. When he flipped the envelope over, he noticed there was no return address.

He knew he shouldn’t open the letter. If it had been addressed to anyone *but* his dad he’d have corrected the owl’s mistake and sent the bird off on its way to find the intended recipient. But the lack of return address combined with a general need to piss his dad off in any way he could overpowered any sense of common courtesy. So, without hesitation, Dream ripped open the envelope and unfolded the letter.

What he saw made his stomach drop.

*kṛpṭa mṇḍibiffṃ pṛḥṭ-ṇṃṛḥ*

*Ackerman*

*Baratashvili*

*Davidson*

*Jacobs*

*Technoblade*

*Zakarian*

He didn't recognize the symbols in the first line, though he had a hunch they were runic. Why anyone needed to correspond with his dad in *runic*, he had no clue. One thing he did know, however, was that the paper he held in his hands listed six of his fellow Hogwarts first-years.

Two of the last names were crossed out neatly with a single line: *Jacobs* and *Technoblade*. Of the names that had not yet been crossed out, one in particular caught Dream's eye.

*Davidson*.

George.

Dream's heart was pounding. His thoughts raced, countless horrible images entering his head at once. He *knew* what this list implied, but at the same time he couldn't believe it. All he knew was that he *had* to show it to George as soon as possible.

Dream's thoughts were interrupted by Schlatt, who eyed the letter curiously.

"What's it say?" he asked, quirking an eyebrow.

"Nothing."

"Oh c'mon, Clay—"

"Don't call me that."

Schlatt's eyes narrowed for a fraction of a second before his expression morphed into one of faux friendliness. "We're buddies, man! From one snake to another, what's the letter?"

Dream just waved his hand dismissively at his roommate before turning around and stuffing the note back inside the envelope. "It's not even for me," he said over his shoulder. "I think it's meant for my dad."

Schlatt's curiosity piqued at this. "Ah, ol' Selwyn Senior. Hey, which one are you again? The Fifth?"

"Third."

"Eh, close enough."

Dream tucked the envelope between the pages of his Potions textbook, resolving to bring the list up with George first thing the following morning. He slid the textbook back into his bag before grabbing his towel and making his way to their bathroom.

“Don’t take too long, Dreamy! I call shower next,” Schlatt called out from his own bed in the corner of the dorm.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be quick.”

~~~~~

The next day, George did not see Dream in the Great Hall during breakfast.

Ordinarily, he would find his best friend’s absence concerning. However, the looming threat of end-of-year examinations coupled with the fact that Schlatt was also absent from the Slytherin table led George to conclude that the two roommates were probably holed up somewhere, studying together.

George snorted at the thought. *Yeah, right.* They were probably sleeping in and Dream would *still* pull some of the highest marks. Whatever the reason, George figured he’d just catch up with the blond during their morning History of Magic class after breakfast.

However, Dream was not in his usual seat when George arrived at their classroom.

George’s leg bounced nervously under his desk as his eyes scanned the room, searching for a familiar head of sand-colored hair. When Professor Binns began his lecture on the Gargoyle Strike of 1911 and Dream had *still* not shown up, a sickening sense of dread pooled in the pit of George’s stomach.

Something was wrong. Dream wouldn’t just skive off school with only three days remaining until their end-of-year assessments.

The class went on, but George couldn’t make himself focus. How could he? The last two times his classmates had failed to show up to places, they’d been *attacked*. Visions of Dream, bloodied and lying unconscious in a hallway, invaded George’s thoughts.

Just as George started to become overwhelmed by the anxious spiral, the classroom door opened. Unfortunately for George, the person who entered was not the one he had hoped to see.

Schlatt silently placed his late pass on the Professor’s desk before slipping away to take his seat at the very back of the class. George tried to catch the Slytherin’s attention as the boy passed, hoping to find out where exactly his best friend had gone off to, but Schlatt seemed to be deliberately avoiding his gaze.

Everything about this situation reminded George of Techno’s attack. The sense of foreboding grew with every passing minute. The second that Professor Binns dismissed them, he was jumping out of his seat and chasing down Dream’s roommate.

“Schlatt!” George called out, catching the other boy’s arm before he could escape. The Slytherin stiffened before turning around to face George, the neutral expression on his face betraying nothing.

“What can I do for ya, Georgie?” Schlatt asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Where’s—”

“Selwyn? I’m afraid I can’t disclose that information to ya,” Dream’s roommate interrupted with a shrug.

“What? What do you mean? Neither of you were at breakfast this morning, you *obviously* know where he is—”

“Of course I know where he is, held up me and our other two roommates all breakfast, the lucky bastards at least got to see the end of it.” Schlatt tsked, his stomach grumbling at just that moment as if to punctuate its absence from the meal, “See? Look at me! The man owes me a serious apology when I see him, he’ll be lucky if I don’t hex him for all he’s worth.”

George’s eyes widened at the threat.

“Kidding, kidding, just jokes, Davidson, lighten up.” Schlatt chuckled, slapping his shoulder good naturedly, “You Ravenclaws are always so uptight, aren’t you? Shoulda known, that’s where Selwyn gets it from, isn’t it? I’m gonna head off to herbology before I catch it too.”

With a turn of his heel the Slytherin marched off to his next class, leaving George to watch him with a feeling of unease in the pit of his stomach.

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Dream was not at any of the House tables in the Great Hall by the time lunch rolled around. George knew this because he had gone to each one of them personally, receiving sympathetic looks from the Hufflepuffs and eye rolls from the Slytherins.

“Really, Davidson, you’re practically obsessed. Relax, will ya?” Schlatt drawled, twirling a giant mass of spaghetti on his fork. “You should get a hobby that *isn’t* worrying all the time.”

He ignored Schlatt’s quip, mumbling something about feeling ill before sprinting off to the Hospital Wing. What if whatever he was doing with Schlatt and his roommates was over and everyone just thought he was still there but he had really been attacked along the way back? What if he also had a giant cut on his arm but this time it was *worse* and his *entire* arm had gotten cut off?!

He threw the doors to the Hospital Wing open, but the only student being tended to by Madame Abbott was a Gryffindor quidditch player with a dislocated shoulder.

Needless to say, the sight didn’t make him feel any better.

George reluctantly attended the rest of the day’s lessons, forcing himself to sit through each class even though his brain kept telling him to look for Dream. He kept hoping that the Slytherin would eventually pop into one of their shared classes with an apologetic look and an explanation for his disappearance, but his best friend was nowhere to be found.

The thoughts plagued him all the way through to Transfiguration class, where Professor Winger was reviewing how to cast *Avifors* on inanimate objects, when Wilbur suddenly asked a question.



“Sir, if you were to transfigure an object into an owl, would that owl be able to deliver the post like a normal owl would?”

George’s eyes suddenly lit up, an idea beginning to form in his brain.

Professor Winger raised his eyebrows, impressed by the question.

“What an interesting query you have posed, Mr. Soot. Five points to Ravenclaw for your academic curiosity. Now, if you recall Gamp’s Law of Elemental Transfiguration...”

George didn’t bother paying attention to the rest of the professor’s explanation because his brain was stuck on one word: *owl*.

Owls could deliver letters to anyone, anywhere; they didn’t even need an address. Back before the school year started Dream explained that owls had a natural affinity to magic and could locate magical people using some sort of sixth sense. Which meant that George could just go to the owlery and send Dream a letter!

With this new plan in mind, George shot out of his seat the second Transfiguration was over, not bothering to tell any of his roommates where he was headed. His legs carried him swiftly down several corridors and many flights of stairs until he was *finally* at the top of the West Tower where the owls resided. George entered the room, scrunching his nose as the stench of owl droppings assaulted his senses.

“Okay, which one of you wants to deliver a note to Dream?” George asked his avian audience.

A few of the owls tilted their heads and blinked at him curiously. One large barn owl ruffled its feathers and hooted at George loudly.

“Okay, I’ll take that as a yes,” George said, tearing out a page from a random notebook and reaching into his bag for a pen. George used quills in class and during exams, but he found that nothing beat a good, old-fashioned Muggle ballpoint pen when it came to scrawling quick notes.

He paused for a moment with his pen hovering above the paper, wondering what to write. He had so many questions he wanted to ask, but for the sake of brevity he kept the message short and simple.

*Are you ok? Worried about you — write me back. George.*

Once George was satisfied that the words were clear and legible, he extended the note to the barn owl, who quickly snatched it out of his hands with its beak.

“I need you to take this to Dream — er, I mean, Clay. Clay Selwyn the Third. Can you do that?” he asked the bird seriously.

In response, the owl tilted its head once more and took to the skies.

*Please be okay*, was George’s only thought as he watched the bird disappear into the night.

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The response came as soon as George stepped out of the shower that night. Wilbur and Eret were studying downstairs in the common room, so Techno was the only other person who saw the owl tapping at George's window.

"I think you've got mail, George," the other Ravenclaw called out from the other side of the room.

"Really?! Oh!" George exclaimed, tripping over a stray textbook as he scrambled over to his window, yanking it open with all his might. The owl flew past George and landed on his bedside table, a crumpled scrap of parchment in its beak.

"Yes! Thank you so much!" George cried. The owl let out a hoot before taking off once more, presumably flying back to its perch in the school's owlery.

George hurriedly unfolded the paper and cast a hasty "*Lumos*" with his wand. With the aid of the faint light of his wand-tip, George could make out a familiar, borderline illegible handwriting.

im home. suspended last night by mcgonagal. i will tell u what happened when u get home in 2 weeks. good luck on exams u nerd. — dream

George rolled his eyes at Dream's horrific spelling and obnoxious use of text abbreviations, undoubtedly intended to irritate the Ravenclaw. The way that his best friend managed to write all of his letters like text messages was astounding to George given that the pureblood had never even held a Muggle cellphone in his life.

After rereading the note three more times, George let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding. Though the brunet couldn't imagine a reason why Dream would be suspended mere days away from their end-of-term assessments, he was at least comforted by the knowledge that his best friend was alive and not bleeding out in a dark corner somewhere.

Still, George had so many questions he wanted to ask now that he knew the blond was safe. What did Dream do? How was Dream going to pass his exams if he was suspended? Why was his staying home all the way till the end of the term? What did his roommates have to do with all of this? Why did—

"Y'know, if you're tryin' to do some transfiguratin' on that paper you gotta *say* the spell, right?" Techno asked, breaking the silence and snapping George out of his thoughts, "Starin' at it isn't gonna do anything."

George quickly set the letter on his bedside table, embarrassed. "I know *that*," he huffed, "It's just a note from Dream, I'm not trying to transfigure it into anything."

"Oh," Techno replied without looking up from his Charms textbook. "Where's Selwyn, anyway? Haven't seen him today."

George opened his mouth to reply, but thought better of it. Instead of explaining the note further, he simply shrugged. "He had to go home for an emergency," George said as casually as he could.

"That's rough." Techno hummed sympathetically, continuing to flip through his homework, "Hope he's alright,"

“I thought you didn’t like Dream,” George remarked, puzzled. “Why would you hope he’s alright?”

At this question, the other Ravenclaw shot George an incredulous look. “Geez, George, I don’t *hate* the guy! What’d you think I was gonna wish for him to *not* be alright? Selwyn can be annoyin’ sometimes, but this place’d be a lot less interestin’ without him.”

Wilbur and Eret entered the room, then, but Techno and George continued their conversation.

“Y-yeah. It would be,” George stammered. “Just didn’t think *you* would see it that way.”

“Well I have *eyes*, you know. If it wasn’t for him my first year woulda been completely uneventful! I mean, how many people get to say they were attacked in their first year here, right?”

“We’re talking about Dream?” Wilbur asked. “Techno, you clearly haven’t been listening in history,” Wilbur chuckled, tapping the textbook under his elbow with the tip of his wand, “There’s practically an entire section for ‘attacked first years’ in this thing!”

“And now I get to be another name on a list of hundreds,” Techno sighed, “All thanks to Selwyn. Truly an honor. Write him back with my thanks.”

George nodded halfheartedly, turning his head to stare absently out the window. It had only been a single day without his best friend and George already missed him terribly.

Just two more weeks, George , he tried to reassure himself. *Two weeks and you’ll know what happened to him.*

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The two weeks that followed were the longest of George’s life.

Exams were hell. George and his roommates barely got any sleep. Prefects were a thousand times more irritable than usual; even Philza, who was usually a kind and understanding person, took House Points from Eret for “breathing too loudly in the common room.” Needless to say, George was relieved when assessments were finally over.

Much to everyone’s surprise (and Bad’s utter delight), Hufflepuff won the House Cup that year. Slytherin had been in the lead for months up until hundreds of House Points mysteriously vanished one night with no explanation. The Slytherins were livid, but George was happy for his Hufflepuff friends. Apparently, this was the first House Cup victory for Hufflepuff in eleven years. Karl was overjoyed.

It felt like an eternity had passed before George was *finally* boarding the Hogwarts Express again after the most stressful examination period he’d ever experienced.

As the four Ravenclaw roommates chatted idly on the way to King’s Cross, he kept the note from Dream tucked safely in the front pocket of his jean shorts. Eret and Wilbur had poked fun at his decision to wear Muggle clothes on the train ride back, but George knew that his friends were just jealous that they had to suffocate under layers of black cloth in the summer heat.

At the station in London, George’s parents were waiting for him excitedly on Platform Nine and

Three-Quarters.

“Georgie!” his mother exclaimed joyfully as she wrapped her son up in a big hug. His father patted him on the back and picked up his belongings to carry to the car.

“*Mum!* Stop it!” George whined, blushing at the display of parental affection.

“Oh, hush,” his mom admonished as they broke apart. “As if your friends don’t hug their mothers. Just look at *that* boy over there with the blue tie! *His* mother got to hug him.”

“Oh my *god*, Mum, don’t point at Wilbur!”

“Oh! That one’s Wilbur? Your roommate? Shall I go introduce myself to his mum?”

“*No!* Please don’t!”

“Oh *fine* . So embarrassed of everything now that you’re in secondary school. Let’s get you home, then.”

The Davidsons exited the platform together and made their way to the car park. Being back in the Muggle world felt strange to George. It wasn’t that he didn’t *like* Muggle life; on the contrary, there were many aspects of it, such as watching television and listening to music by bands he *actually* liked (none of that garbage Dream listened to on the Wizarding Wireless Network), that George greatly looked forward to enjoying over the summer. Everything around him just took on new meaning now that he was a wizard.

Though some wizards considered him unlucky to have been raised by a Muggle family, George didn’t see his Muggle-born status as a hindrance. On the contrary — he got to experience the best of both worlds.

In the front seats, his parents began to catch him up on all the things he’d missed in their neighborhood while he was away. His old primary school was undergoing renovations. Their neighbors across the street had a baby girl. A Tesco was going to open nearby. It was humbling, in a way, hearing about how his old world was going on without him.

As the car drove steadily on, George could feel the past week’s sleepless nights starting to catch up to him. Before long, he fell asleep to the soothing sounds of his parents’ voices.

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The woods behind George’s house were so full of life during the summer. By the time he had finally been able to escape his parents’ endless onslaught of questions (*How did exams go, George? Did you see that we bought our own owl to send you mail, George? How does she find you all the way in Scotland? Have you been eating vegetables at school at all?*) the sun had already set. George breathed in the familiar scents of the forest, smiling when he spotted the faint glow of a magical Flitterby moth in midair.

It was hard to believe that magical creatures had existed around him his whole life and he hadn’t even *noticed* them before he met Dream.

Dream.

George knew exactly where Dream would be, somehow. Though the boys hadn't agreed on a meeting place, George could *sense* that his best friend was already waiting for him.

George's intuition proved to be correct only moments later as he stumbled into their small clearing. There, sitting atop the stump where George had set up Dream's tenth "birthday party" almost two years prior, was Dream. His blond hair looked white under the light of the rising moon, and George didn't need full color vision to tell that the sight was ethereal.

Dream looked up and grinned when he saw George approaching.

"Gogi!" he called out excitedly, and George smiled in spite of the silly nickname.

"I'm so happy you're here," George said before giving his friend a quick hug.

"Me, too," Dream replied quietly.

Once the boys were done greeting each other, George began his interrogation.

"How did you get out of writing exams?" the shorter boy demanded, crossing his arms and giving Dream a sharp look.

Instead of answering the question, Dream threw his head back and laughed.

"*Dream!* Answer me! You were absent for almost *two weeks*!"

"Sorry, sorry. I just can't believe your first question was about those *stupid exams*. You really are a—"

"If you call me a nerd one more time I will hex you."

"— *Ravenclaw*. And you're not allowed to hex me, you moron. We can't do magic outside of school."

"I'll just have to punch you, then."

"*Ha*. As if your short little arms could reach me."

"*Dream!*"

"Alright, alright, calm down," Dream said, taking a seat on their favorite stump. All at once, the joking atmosphere vanished and the blond's expression turned serious.

"I was suspended," Dream said in a low voice.

George shuffled impatiently. "Yeah, I got your owl. You didn't say why, though."

"I'll get to that."

Several moments passed in tense silence before Dream took a deep breath and began to explain.

"The night before I went 'missing,' McGonagall got ahold of a letter someone sent me by accident. It was...not good," Dream said quietly, averting his eyes.

George walked over to the tree stump and took a seat next to his friend. "How does that have anything to do with you being suspended?" he asked gently.

“McGonagall thought the note was *mine* . She thought that I wrote it.”

George furrowed his brows as he contemplated this response. “Okay...” he began. “But what did the letter say, Dream?”

Dream groaned and buried his face in his hands before he answered. “It was a list of names of a few students in our year. There were these weird runes at the top, like some secret code or something.”

George hummed, thinking. Dream was staring absently into the distance, and George knew the Slytherin was picturing the list in his mind.

“Technoblade’s name was on it,” Dream revealed. “Karl’s too. But their names were both crossed out.”

George gasped at this new information and jumped up from his seat. “The attacks!”

Dream nodded grimly. “Exactly. It was some weird hit list.”

“But then...McGonagall should have been thrilled to find the letter! If someone sent it to you by accident, that means whoever sent it *knows* about the mystery assailant!”

“George. She suspended me, remember? She thinks I *am* the mystery assailant. Or at least she thinks I *know* him.”

George’s face fell. “But...but...that’s ridiculous! You would *never* want to hurt Techno or Karl!”

“Well, she questioned all of my roommates. Eric — ugh, I *knew* I shouldn’t’ve told that *idiot* — let it spill that I wanted to duel Techno at the start of the year before the first attack. And, well...” Dream trailed off with a frown, “that detail didn’t help my case.”

“That’s bollocks. There’s a big difference between a friendly duel and attempted *murder* .”

“You see the way Techno and I act around each other. Do we look ‘friendly’ to you?”

George began to protest, but Dream shook his head and held up a hand, silencing the shorter boy.

“Look...I don’t know how McGonagall got the letter. I hid it away right after I read it because I needed to show it to you and the other Ravenclaws. Maybe it was enchanted with a failed anti-theft charm or something, or maybe that stupid owl snatched it back while I was sleeping and then it was intercepted. The point is, there’s something important you should know, George.”

George swallowed nervously. “What would that be?”

Dream’s eyes were dead-serious when they met George’s own. “That list? Your name was on it. And McGonagall read the name on the envelope wrong — that letter wasn’t intended for me. I’m Clay Ellsworth Aurelius Selwyn the *Third* . The letter was intended for Clay Ellsworth Aurelius Selwyn the Second.”

George’s eyes widened as he put two and two together. “You mean...”

“Yeah,” Dream sighed. “My dad.”

According to AO3 statistics, only a small percentage of readers actually leave kudos. If you liked this chapter, please consider leaving kudos and a comment! It's free and your feedback makes me soooo happy :)

Also, I made a tumblr if anyone is interested. It's empty for now, but I might use it more in the future! Plus, y'all can ask me questions there 'n stuff :D Here's the link:
<https://kangarooken.tumblr.com/>

See y'all next update!

Chapter Seven || Year Two

Chapter Summary

The second year begins.

Chapter Notes

Hello! Welcome to another chapter :) This update is sponsored by Gra55. idk what I'd do without them and their epic character writing abilities. Pls show 'em lotsa love <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George rarely saw Dream after that initial meeting in the woods.

On the few occasions that Dream's dad had allowed him outside, the blond boy had been noticeably on edge. George could hardly say a word about the events of the academic year, let alone hold a conversation about them.

They'd be sitting and chatting and George's laugh would slowly die down and he'd try to bring it up only to get instantly shot down.

"Did..Did you find out anything about the—?" George would ask in a voice barely above a whisper.

"*Shhh*, not here!" Dream would interrupt, eyes always darting around frantically. "You don't know who's listening."

But staying quiet was easier said than done. The knowledge that someone — likely Dream's own *dad* — hated George enough to put him on some bizarre hit list terrified him, and the only person who seemed to know anything about it couldn't say a word.

It was soon the last day of July, and George could count the number of times he'd seen Dream on one hand. Summer was lonely without the Slytherin; it wasn't like George had any Muggle friends he could visit.

He had sent owls to his roommates, asking them how their summers were going. Wilbur was on holiday in Germany visiting family friends, Eret's cousin was getting married in Ireland, Techno didn't respond. The fact that all of his friends were probably having amazing summer adventures made his own loneliness all the more apparent.

He was sitting in the clearing, halfheartedly skimming the list of required textbooks while his parents' new owl, Ruby, violently crushed a mouse with her talons in the grass beside him. Despite the fact that Muggles *are* able to send mail to Hogwarts via the British postal service, his parents were so intrigued by the concept of owl post that they'd gone to Eeylops Owl Emporium during the school year and immediately fell in love with the stocky, medium-sized tawny owl.

“Ruby, that’s *disgusting*, ” George muttered, grimacing at the way the bird proceeded to swallow her bloodied prey whole.

Ruby narrowed her eyes in his direction as she forced the catch down her throat, hooting in indignation around the mouse.

“I know, but you don’t have to do it in *front* of me.”

“*Hoo!* ”

“Are you seriously bullying your parents’ owl?” a familiar voice called out, interrupting George’s one sided conversation.

George’s head instantly snapped in its direction, grinning widely when he spotted a freckled face peering at him from behind a tree.

“Dream! You’re outside!” George exclaimed in surprise, shooting to his feet, “That makes it five times all summer!”

“Wow, five already? Merlin’s beard, it’s too much, I’m going back in.” Dream snickered, turning around.

“Come back here, you idiot,” George chuckled, “How’d you get out this time?”

“I walked.”

George rolled his eyes at his friend and huffed impatiently. “No, you imbecile, you know what I meant! What about your... you know....” he lowered his voice, “*dad* ?”

Dream’s eyes brightened, “You won’t believe our luck, Georgie!” He exclaimed, “He’s gone! I’m finally free!”

George’s eyes widened incredulously. “He *DIED*?!”

“What? No! He’s just off on some business trip!” Dream cried. “He left for Florida early this morning. Geez, if he were dead I’d have to go to the stupid funeral and then we wouldn’t get to hang out.”

“Right...” George nodded slowly, “So...does that mean that you and I can spend the rest of the summer together? Just like old times?”

“Heck yeah we can!” Dream cheered, “I’m going to stay out late every single night!”

“And I’ll finally have some company!”

Dream smiled cheekily at that and ruffled the shorter boy’s dark hair. “Aww, Georgie! You missed me?” he teased.

Yes , George thought, blushing. Not that he’d ever admit that to Dream. “Shut up,” he grumbled instead, reaching up to tousle his friend’s hair for revenge. Unfortunately, his height disadvantage meant that Dream was able to dodge the attempt easily and pin his arm behind his back.

“Poor Georgie, so *short* ,” Dream taunted his friend, much to George’s own embarrassment.

“I’m *so* going to hex you when we get back to school,” George threatened.

“You’ll have to catch me first.”

“What?”

Just like that, Dream was sprinting in the direction of the forest, laughing freely as his long legs propelled him into the woods.

“You could at least give me a warning!” George called out to his quickly-disappearing friend.

“Come and get me, *Gogi!*”

“Do *not* call me that!” George yelled before shoving the reading list into his pocket and taking off after the blond.

They spent the rest of the day chasing each other around the forest and playing games, just like they did during the summers before Hogwarts. It was nice to be with Dream again. It was so nice, in fact, that George let himself forget the strange hit list and the probably evil wizard next door.

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The hit list didn’t make a comeback to the forefront of his mind until after Dream’s twelfth birthday.

He *knew* that it was something he should have brought up sooner — his own name was on it, after all — but the fears that had clouded his mind all through July just didn’t feel as pressing when he had Dream by his side. Plus, he didn’t want to ruin his best friend’s mood so close to his special day.

He had gotten Dream a Muggle camera for his birthday. It actually took a while for him to find the right one — the camera couldn’t be rechargeable because magic fried electronics — but eventually he had purchased a small, cheap, battery-powered digital camera from a local electronics store. Dream had been completely fascinated.

“The pictures don’t move at *all!*” the blond exclaimed as he scrutinized a photo he’d taken. Much to George’s amusement, Dream had taken over a hundred photos of his own feet that morning in an effort to bring the images to life.

“That’s how pictures are supposed to be, you idiot.”

“No! The people in photos are supposed to move around. You’ve seen them.”

“Well, in the Muggle world, pictures that move are called *GIFs* .”

“I thought those were called videos?”

“A video is longer, and it doesn’t loop. A GIF plays over and over again when you click on it.”

“What? Click?”

“Yeah, like on a computer.”

“What the heck is a *comp-you-tuh* ? Stop using all these weird No-Maj words!”

Dream's birthday had been too fun and too full of incredulous cries over Dream's Muggle ignorance to spoil with talk of hit lists and magical attacks. So George let the day pass without saying a word about it, up until the following evening.

The boys were spread out on the grass in George's backyard that night, stargazing and making jokes about Astronomy class.

"Do you remember when Schlatt rubbed charcoal on the eyepiece of Professor Sinistra's telescope?" Dream asked, chuckling.

George snorted. "How could I forget? He lost twenty House Points *and* got detention with Filch."

"He still says it was worth it. She looked so funny with a big black ring around her eye!"

George nodded, "Karl couldn't stop laughing when he heard the story."

"Bet he wishes he wasn't one of those goody two shoes Hufflepuffs, he'd get a laugh out every day!"

"Karl doesn't need one of you guys to do something stupid and get the teachers mad for him to laugh," George rolled his eyes. "He even laughed on his own hospital bed! Back during the...."

Dream stiffened beside him, his hands balled into tight fists at his side.

George let out a sigh, looking away from him so he stared up at the endless night sky, hoping to get lost in it forever. They lay there in awkward silence, neither saying a word. A shooting star flew past above them and George screwed his eyes shut, mustering up his courage.

"I'm scared," he whispered, feeling a sting in the back of his eyes. "I don't want that to happen to me too."

"It won't." Dream stated, as though it were fact.

"But...your dad is —"

"— not even in the country. And he's *not* going to hurt you." Dream turned to face him, "I promise."

"How can you be sure? I was on the list, I'm a target."

"Whoever made that stupid list isn't going to start attacking kids again. I've been thinking about it a lot," Dream said, pulling himself up into a sitting position.

"Why wouldn't they?" George pressed.

"Well, you should've seen my dad's reaction when I was suspended. He looked *pissed*, but not at me. He wasn't surprised at all when McGonagall told him about the letter."

"But..." George gulped, "How can that mean that there won't be more attacks?"

"My dad has zero tolerance for stupid mistakes. He sent a lot of owls off that night, and I'm pretty sure I saw him write the word 'stop' in bright red ink in one of the letters when I peered over his shoulder," Dream confessed. "Techno and Karl's attacks were too careless. If my dad's involved in this thing, and I'm sure that he is, he won't be taking any more chances. It would be too obvious now."

George went quiet and contemplated Dream's words. They made sense, he supposed, yet he still couldn't shake off the awful feeling that someone out there wanted to hurt him.

"Don't worry, Gogi. No one'll attack you on my watch." Dream grinned, as though he could read his mind.

For the first time in forever, George didn't object to the stupid nickname.

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"Do you wiwy hafta go tomowow, Geowgie?"

It was the day before the start of their second year, and Dream and George were babysitting Drista in George's backyard. Dream's mum had to do some last minute shopping before the start of term, and with Selwyn Sr. still in Florida, Dream was put in charge of keeping his little sister alive until her return. Naturally, he forced George to watch her as well.

Though Dream complained, George didn't mind the four-year-old's presence. She was adorably cheeky and fun to talk to with her cute lisp. Plus, she took an instant liking to George and followed him around like a puppy, much to Dream's annoyance and George's amusement.

"Yes, he has to go. We're both getting on the train tomorrow," Dream told her with an eye roll.

Drista pouted and crossed her little arms in front of her chest. "I don't want Geowgie to leave. Can I come, too?"

"Not until you're eleven, you dummy. You don't even have magic yet."

"Daddy says I will get my magic soon! And then I'm gonna make you on fire cuz you're a poopoo head!"

George laughed at the little girl's threat. "It'll be awhile until you can set things on fire, Drista. Dream *still* can't cast *Incendio* correctly, and he's twelve."

"*Hey!* I can make big red sparks now."

"Oh, shush," George said with a smile. Drista looked pleased to hear that her older brother wasn't a great wizard yet. Her green eyes were wide as she turned to George and asked him if *he* could make fire.

"I can," George boasted proudly.

"Show me! Pwease?"

"I can't show you until I'm seventeen. Kids can't do magic outside of school."

Drista's disappointment was immediate. "That's so stupid!" she cried, scowling.

"*You're* stupid," Dream shot back.

"*Dweam!* I'm gonna tell Mommy you said that!"

George laughed as Dream scooped his little sister up into his arms and twirled her in a circle. Soon, both siblings were giggling and falling on top of each other in a dizzy heap. The sight made George wish he had a sibling, too.

When the two blonds were able to stand up straight again, Dream ruffled Drista's hair. "Don't tell on me, Drista. At Hogwarts, you're not allowed to tell on other kids, 'cuz if you do you get cursed. Right, George?"

George snorted, but played along. "Oh, sure. The ghosts come out of the walls and haunt you for the rest of your life."

"*What?!*" Drista exclaimed.

Dream nodded solemnly. "It's true. Snitches get *more* than just stitches at Hogwarts. If you wanna be a powerful witch someday, you can't tell on me, got it?"

Drista's freckled face twisted into a serious expression. Her green eyes were determined as she promised never to tell on Dream again. "I'm gonna be the most powerful witch *eva*."

Dream smiled proudly and patted the little girl on the back. "Of course you will be. Thank god George and I'll already be done with school before you're eleven — you'll probably be the scariest witch of your age."

They played monkey in the middle with a quaffle until Dream's mum returned. The whole time they played with Drista, George wondered what it would have been like to grow up with so much magical knowledge. To grow up *knowing* you were destined for great things...it was hard to imagine that kind of pressure. For George, magic had been a wondrous, eye-opening surprise — a once-in-a-lifetime gift.

Dream had once called George unlucky for being born into a Muggle family. Yet, as George regarded the tall boy before him, saddled with countless pureblood expectations and carrying the burden of his family's troubled history, George felt grateful for his own "muddy" blood.

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The first thing George did when he saw his roommates on Platform Nine and Three-Quarters was march up to Technoblade and punch him.

"On the old injury!" Techno whined, wincing and rubbing his shoulder. "What're you tryna duel me or somethin'?"

"*Three* owls, Techno. Three! You couldn't respond to a *single* one?!" George cried.

At least Techno had the decency to look sheepish. "Oh, yeah. Sorry 'bout that."

George stood a bit taller and put his hands on his hips. "Sorry is an understatement! I was so *worried*, Techno! I thought maybe something happened to you! What if —"

"George, mate, calm down," Wilbur interrupted in with a hand on George's shoulder. "If it makes you feel any better, he once answered a three-page letter from me with just the word '*ok*.' On a napkin. He's an arse when it comes to keeping in touch with people."

“Hmmp. He could’ve at least sent me back *something*,” George grumbled unhappily.

Dream split off from the Ravenclaws to go catch up with his own roommates on the other side of the platform, but the blond promised he’d find George again on the train.

It was lovely to catch up with his classmates again after spending an entire summer apart. Apparently Karl and Bad had purchased matching pet toads over the break, because they were eager to show them off to anyone who passed by.

“Wanna hold him, George?” Karl asked the Ravenclaw excitedly as they boarded the train. George eyed the creature skeptically and shook his head.

“Er, no thanks, Karl.”

“But he’s so friendly!”

“I wanna hold it! Hand the bastard over!” Schlatt chimed in, appearing over their shoulders with his arms outstretched, making a grabby motion at the toad.

“Just be gentle with him, he’s a little sensitive.” Karl said, planting the creature in Schlatt’s palms.

“Woahhhh, you’re *disgusting*!” Schlatt grinned, bringing the toad up to his face, “I thought you were gonna be all slimy, but you just look like a wrinkly old man! He looks just like Filch!”

“*Hey*. Don’t be a mean muffin.” Bad huffed at him.

“Mean to who, Filch or the toad?” Schlatt snickered.

Bad considered the question for a moment. “Umm, the toad,” he decided. “It’s not nice to the toad.”

Schlatt cackled, holding the toad up high. “Damn right it isn’t! Filch is a mean bastard, I can’t stand the guy! But you’re kinda alright, toad.”

Bad wrinkled his nose at the profanity. “I think we should go find our own compartment now, Karl. We don’t wanna hold up everyone.”

The group split up and found different compartments. George, Techno and Wilbur all piled into one together, with Dream and Schlatt joining in soon after.

Eret had stammered out something about already making plans with someone and darted off deeper into the train, but nobody thought much of it.

The boys all took their seats and joked about déjà vu — they had subconsciously sat in the same seating arrangement from exactly a year prior.

The train gave a warning whistle, signalling that five minutes remained until departure. Beside George, Dream pulled out a box of Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans and offered one of the sweets to his friend.

“*No*. Remember what happened last time? You fed me *vomit*, Dream,” George said with a shudder.

“Oh, c’mon. There are actually some really good flavors in here.”

“I’m not taking any chances.”

Their conversation was interrupted by someone opening their door. All eyes turned to a small boy with jet black hair pulled back with a white headband currently peeking into their compartment.

"Hello! My friend Ponk and I can't find an empty compartment, so we were wondering if we could \_\_\_"

"Nope, sorry, no kids allowed," Dream said, making to slide the door closed with his foot.

"We're not kids!" the boy huffed angrily.

"Oh c'mon now! Of *course* they can come in!" Schlatt tsked, then turned to the boy, "Don't mind *Selwyn* here, you know how they are, big families and their self importance, they don't usually bother with the whole common courtesy thing." He patted Dream's arm as the blond glared daggers at him, "What's your name, kid?"

"Oh! I'm Sappitus Nappitus! But everyone just calls me Sapnap, thanks for letting us in!" Sapnap exclaimed shoving himself into the compartment as he beckoned another boy in from behind him, "This is Ponk."

"Well it's very nice to meet you both," Schlatt grinned, a mischievous glint catching his eye, "You know, we were all *just* opening up this box of Every Flavor Beans! You guys should try some!"

"Pff, I'm not *stupid*, there's no way I'm putting a single one of those in my mouth." Sapnap snorted, "With my luck, I'll end up with a dirty sock flavored bean."

"Oh, but that's where you're mistaken, you see. I have the absolute *best* intuition when it comes to these candies, right Dream?" Schlatt's grin widened as he turned to his roommate with the tiniest wink.

A look of sudden realization crossed Dreams eyes and soon he, too, was grinning. "Oh yeah, Schlatt has never once led me astray with these beans. He's got, like, a sixth sense when it comes to them!"

"Woah, really?" Ponk asked, his eyes widening.

"You betcha, I can tell *exactly* which flavors are good and which will land you in St. Mungo's," Schlatt said solemnly.

"They can do that?!" George asked, eyeing the innocent looking beans in Dreams hand as he slowly inched away from them.

"Sure can! But don't worry, I'll never let a bean be the thing to take you out, Davidson," Schlatt patted his arm, "I'm the certified bean expert of the compartment, no deadly bean passes on my watch! Hand over the box, Dream-boat!"

Dream plopped the box onto Schlatt's outstretched palm. "They're in your capable hands now, oh Holy Bean Man."

Schlatt reached into the box and carefully picked out two beans, one bright red and one deep yellow. He stared at the beans intently, holding up each one close to his eye and making a show of sniffing them and putting them up near his ear. With a final nod, he placed the red bean carefully in Sapnap's hand and the yellow one in Ponk's.

"I know I've only just met you two," Schlatt sniffed, dabbing at his eye, "but I truly feel that I've gotten quite close to the both of you, and so I've picked the beans that I feel would perfectly match

you."

Sapnap and Ponk stared at the boy with awe in their eyes, "Thank you, Holy Bean Man," Sapnap saluted, "I'll cherish every bite." And with that the two popped the beans into their mouths.

In an instant, they both went flying out of their seats, Sapnap heaving dryly on the floor as Ponk made a mad dash out of the compartment.

"WHAT THE HELL?!" Sapnap cried, tears building up in his eyes as he coughed dryly, "What was THAT?!"

Schlatt cackled maniacally, elbowing Dream in the rib as the other wheezed dramatically, gripping onto the sides of the wall. The Ravensclaws glanced at each other, and then at the howling Slytherins, before looking back down at the new boy, who was frantically clawing at his throat in an attempt to tear the bean out of it.

"Wh-what did you feed him?!" Dream spluttered, wiping a tear from his eye.

"D-Dragon-breath pepper!" Schlatt stammered through his laughter, sending them both into another fit as Wilbur's eyes widened in concern.

"It— it doesn't have the same *effects*, does it?" He asked, glancing at the sweating first year who had lost all speaking abilities and was now just gasping in panic.

"Psh, hell if I know, I've never been stupid enough to try one of *those* flavors! What are the odds that you had such great bad ones?!"

"What'd you feed the other kid?" Techno asked, a small smirk tugging the corners of his lips.

"PISS!"

And that was enough to set off everyone else in the cart. Even Sapnap's struggle was paused for a short moment to snort at the revelation.

"Let's— let's get you to someone who can help," Wilbur stammered, holding in his laughter as he grabbed the writhing boy by the arms and started dragging him out of the compartment. "Please don't poison any more first-years while I'm gone," he added before the door slid shut behind him.

"You're an absolute genius, Schlatt!" Dream cried, slapping his back, "A genius!"

"How'd you know they would be that bad?" George chuckled, "They looked perfectly normal to me."

"It's all in that sixth sense." Schlatt sighed, calming down. "The gift has been passed down for generations in my family."

"He got me with that trick the first week we roomed!" Dream exclaimed, "I started studying extra hard in charms thanks to that so I could hex the living daylights out of him as revenge."

"Wow Dream, I thought *I* was the only one who could motivate you to do well in charms," Techno snickered.

"Yeah well, tough luck, buttercup." Schlatt threw his arm around Dream's shoulder, "You just weren't enough for him! He needed a *real* rival, you're just his side argument."

"I thought what we had was special." Techno sighed, "I can't believe this."



"Techno, please, I'll always hate you more, I promise," Dream assured him.

"Wowwww looks like I gotta work twice as hard to be the object of your loathing." Schlatt tsked, "Challenge accepted."

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The Sorting Ceremony was fun to watch as a second-year.

George enjoyed seeing the bright-eyed first-years crowd together nervously in the Great Hall. The youngest students gasped when the hat opened its mouth and began to sing its song. George cheered with the rest of his Housemates when their House was mentioned (*"Said Ravenclaw, 'I'll take those whose intelligence is surest!'"*). After the Hat finished singing, McGonagall began to call out names.

"Al-Abadi, Zohra!"

A tiny girl with long black hair walked forward and put the hat on her head. Seconds later, she was pronounced a Hufflepuff.

"We got the first muffin of the night!" George heard Bad call out from the Hufflepuff table.

The rest of the Sorting went by quickly. A chubby boy with ginger hair joined Ravenclaw and a set of identical twins were both sent to Slytherin. After a blonde girl joined the Gryffindor table, McGonagall cleared her throat and read out another name.

"Fundy, Floris."

A boy with dark auburn hair and — were those *fox ears*? — walked up to the hat. It took the hat almost three whole minutes to decide, but eventually it made its decision.

"HUFFLEPUFF!" the hat declared. Unlike the other excited first-years, the fox-eared boy did not look happy with the decision. George couldn't understand why anyone would object to being a Hufflepuff; Karl and Bad were two of the nicest people he knew.

A few more names were called before a name George recognized was called.

"Nappitus, Sappitus!"

The boy who Schlatt had tried to murder on the Hogwarts Express walked up to the hat excitedly, seemingly cured from the effects of the bean. It barely even touched his head before a decision was made.

"GRYFFINDOR!"

The boy — *Sapnap*, he said to call him — looked thrilled. "Yeah! Let's go !" he cheered as he skipped towards the Gryffindor table.

More names were called; a boy named *Quackity, Alexis* went to Gryffindor as well. The other first-year Schlatt had tricked on the train was declared a Slytherin, and George snorted when he saw Schlatt stand up with a wide grin to personally welcome the first-year to the Serpent House. A few more Ravenclaws joined George's table before the ceremony finally came to a conclusion after

Punzington, Luke and Skeppy, Zak became Gryffindors.

McGonagall vanished the hat with a flick of her wrist and cleared her throat. The hall of students went quiet as they prepared to hear their Headmistress speak.

“Greetings, dear Hogwarts students, and welcome back to the most prestigious school of witchcraft and wizardry in the world. I have a few start of term announcements to make before the feast begins. First, Filch would like me to remind all students that anyone found in possession of a dungbomb or fanged frisbee will be given immediate detention. Please consult the official list of contraband items on the notice boards in your common rooms.”

“Bo -ring ,” Eret whispered to George’s left.

“Significant changes have been made to your class schedules this year,” McGonagall continued. The Ravenclaws all perked up at this, wondering what the new schedule changes could possibly be. “Due to recent events within our student body, the school board has agreed that starting this academic year Muggle Studies will no longer be an elective for students in their first through fifth years. The class is now a compulsory O.W.L subject.”

The reaction from the students in the Great Hall was immediate.

“Are you *kiddin’* me?” Techno exclaimed. Wilbur and Eret looked similarly taken aback at the decision. Over at the Slytherin table, George could see hundreds of angered faces all shouting their disagreements.

“*Silence!*”

All at once, the students fell silent. McGonagall’s voice was firm when she continued her announcement.

“Frankly, this schedule change is long overdue. Despite the fact that hundreds of strong, capable witches and wizards laid down their *lives* so that magical people all over Britain and beyond could live in a world without prejudice, discrimination persists within the walls of this very castle.”

George fidgeted in his seat, knowing that McGonagall was talking about discrimination against Muggle-borns like him.

“It is foolish to think that we live in a magical bubble. Muggles are all around us: they are our neighbors. For some of us, they are our parents, our siblings, our husbands and wives. Knowledge of the Muggle world is vital to our understanding of humanity as a whole. Now, it is my pleasure to introduce Professor Bianca Borealis, former Head of the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office and your new Muggle Studies professor.”

The applause was reluctant when the new professor stood up to address the crowd.

“Thank you, Headmistress, for your introduction. My name is Professor Borealis and I am thrilled to be teaching you this year. I understand that my subject is not one that many of you would have chosen independently, but I am confident that you will find the course material engaging nonetheless.”

Borealis paused to take in the faces of the students spread throughout the Great Hall. Her eyes scanned the crowd several times before she ended her speech.

“Dumbledore once said that we are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided. I implore you to remember these words as you begin this academic year.”

"Thank you, Professor Borealis," McGonagall said once the new professor had taken her seat. "There is another new faculty member I must introduce to you before dinner is served: Professor Aurora Travers, former Detective at the Auror Office's Investigation Department and your new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor."

"*Travers?!* " Eret hissed beside him, glancing up nervously as the new professor stood from her seat and scanned the crowd with her piercing grey eyes, "What happened to Chang?!"

"At least Dream doesn't have to worry about her anymore," Wilbur muttered.

"What's wrong with Travers?" George asked, the former Auror looked nice enough, and her hair reminded him of Dream's, but longer. She couldn't have been that bad, he thought.

"Are you *serious?!* Shouldn't Muggle-borns be *especially* aware of which families to look out for?" Eret asked, not taking his eyes off of Aurora as she smiled and thanked McGonagall for her introduction, "Like, seriously, are you *trying* to get hate-crimed?!"

"Stop scaring him!" Wilbur whispered, elbowing Eret in the ribs, "McGonagall wouldn't hire a racist. Now pay attention."

"That's what everyone thought about Dumbledore, but look how well *that* went for him!"

"Dumbledore was different."

"Have we really not learnt our lesson about hiring former Death Eaters? I'll spell it out for you: B-A-D I-D-E-A."

"Why are you discriminating against them now?" Wilbur asked pointedly. "That makes you just as bad as them."

"There is a *huge difference* between discriminating against Muggles and discriminating against *racists!* "

"Well—" Wilbur's words were cut off as McGonagall took the stage again. He narrowed his eyes at Eret for making him miss Aurora's speech.

"Thank you, Professor Travers. On that note, let us all enjoy the wonderful welcoming feast our house elves have prepared for us this evening!" She waved her arm and both Wilbur and Eret seemed to forget their previous argument, their eyes widening at the endless piles of food before them.

Professor McGonagall took her seat and the Great Hall exploded into chatter from all sides. With all the lively energy around him, it was almost too easy for George to drown himself in the excitement and forget his worry over the new DADA professor. That is, until he turned around and caught the woman's gaze locked directly on him.

He tried to ignore the chill that went up his spine when those gray eyes momentarily caught his own, but the feeling lingered long after the meal was over and he was tucked away safely in his old bed.

According to AO3 statistics, only a small percentage of readers actually leave kudos. If you enjoyed this update, please consider leaving kudos and a comment. It's free and it lets us know that you want us to continue!

WE FINALLY GOT THE DREAM TEAM TOGETHER AT HOGWARTS
WOOOO! Hope y'all like Sapnap's wizard name hehe. See y'all next update!

Chapter Eight || Year Two

Chapter Summary

The second-years have their first classes with the new professors.

Chapter Notes

Hey mamas! This chapter, we coded it so that Gra55 has literally no chill. I woke up to discover over 4000 new words in our Google doc. Not joking. This was a blast to write and edit, so we hope y'all like it! Co-sponsored by the College Board™ and their last-minute SAT cancellation.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Rule Number One of my class: no magic allowed.”

George’s first class of the year was, funnily enough, the now-mandatory Muggle Studies course. The first thing that Professor Borealis made them do was deposit their wands in a box which she promptly locked up and placed on her desk, much to the confusion of everyone in the room.

“Professor,” Minx called out once the students were all seated, “I’m not sure if you *noticed*, but this is a school of *witchcraft* and *wizardry*. Ye can’t jus’ take our wands.”

Professor Borealis merely raised an eyebrow at the comment. “Well, Miss...Minx, was it? I’m not sure if *you* noticed, but I’m the professor in this room. It is not your place to question my teaching methods; do it again, and I shall subtract House Points. Do I make myself clear?”

The Slytherin girl looked furious, but she nodded begrudgingly and said no more.

“Very well then. On to Rule Number Two,” their professor continued smoothly. “Discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated. If I hear you so much as a *whisper* of anything close to a racial slur, there will be severe consequences. Understood?”

George nodded along with the rest of the class, thankful that the second rule essentially just amounted to “don’t be a racist.”

“That brings us to Rule Number Three,” Professor Borealis said, coming to a stop in the center of the room. “Respect my subject. Muggle Studies is just as valid as any other discipline at this school. You *will* take this class seriously.”

When the professor wasn’t looking, Dream nudged George and made a show of rolling his eyes.

“Pshhh. ‘Just as valid.’ As *if*,” the Slytherin whispered in George’s ear. The Ravenclaw frowned at his friend’s comment and was about to admonish him for it when their teacher suddenly whirled around to face the second-years, a lit match in her hands and a glint in her eye.

“Professor? Why’re you holding a burning stick?” Wilbur asked, pulling his quill out of his bag

and preparing to take notes on her answer.

In lieu of a response, Professor Borealis dropped the match on her desk, immediately setting fire to a stack of papers and throwing the class into a panic.

“She’s gone *mad* !” Eret cried, backing his desk away from the flames. George was similarly taken aback by the pyromaniacal display; he reflexively reached for his wand to cast *Auguamenti* only to remember that everyone’s wands were currently stored away in a box atop a burning desk.

“Give me my wand back, you psycho!” Dream demanded, scrambling towards the front of the room and snatching the box of wands off the table, dropping it onto the floor when the metal nearly burned his hands off.

Professor Borealis shrugged, taking a seat at her desk before the burning pile. “Perhaps *after* you extinguish the fire, Mr. Selwyn.”

Dream let out a scream through gritted teeth as he kicked the box, sending it skidding across the floor but failing to open it.

By now the fire had caught onto the rest of the teacher's desk and was starting to spread about the class. Professor Borealis simply leaned back in her chair and stared at the mess as one student tore down a curtain and threw it onto the flames, spreading smoke around the already stifling room. George coughed, waving his hand in front of his face to clear the air when he spotted something out of the corner of his eye: hanging up on the wall, behind a student who was sleeping through all the chaos, was a bright red fire extinguisher.

“You magical *idiots* ,” George muttered under his breath as he jogged up to the wall and pulled down the metal contraption, nearly dropping it due to its heavy weight. The Ravenclaw stumbled back and bumped into the desk behind him, fumbling with the fire extinguisher before settling himself.

The student at the desk groaned and glanced up from his nap, adjusting the glasses on his face as he rubbed his eyes, "Do you mind?"

"Oh, sor— Techno?"

"Uh, yeah, that's my name. We've been roommates for, like, a year, George. I was kinda hopin' you'd memorized it by now."

"Are you *seriously* sleeping? Aren't you going to help?" George asked incredulously, ignoring the sarcastic remark.

Techno looked around, only just seeming to notice the blazing inferno consuming the class. He shrugged and buried his face back into his hands. "Nah, if it's my time to go, it's my time to go. Have fun with that."

George huffed and pulled the fire extinguisher closer to him. Their classmates were now frantically banging on the classroom windows, taking turns body slamming the glass to try and escape. It took George a few more moments, but he was soon able to unpin the nozzle and aim the rubber hose at the fire. There was a loud *whoosh* as a large blast of white substance exploded from the end of the hose, smothering the flames within seconds before going out of control and spraying the entire classroom, covering the walls and other students who screamed in terror at the new powdery threat.

The fire extinguisher let out a final splutter of powder before finally relenting. George sighed in

relief, dropping the empty canister to the ground and taking in the mess in front of him. Professor Borealis sat with her arms folded across her chest, blinking at George as extinguisher residue dripped off her hair and onto the ground. The Ravenclaw winced, averting his gaze only to discover that all eyes were fixed on him. Every Slytherin and Ravenclaw in the room gaped at him except for Techno, who had probably fallen back asleep. George blushed at the sudden attention.

“Um...I put it out, guys,” he said nervously, running a hand through his hair.

After a few moments, Wilbur broke the silence.

“Bloody *hell* , George. What in the name of Merlin was *that* ?”

All at once, he was flooded with questions.

“Where did you find that red thing, George?”

“How did you know which button to push?”

“What was that white powdery stuff? It looked like Floo powder!”

“Why the hell couldn’t you *control it* ? ! My hair is *ruined* !”

George winced at the last comment, but before he could even attempt to answer a single query, Professor Borealis cleared her throat, turning the attention of the classroom back to her.

“Everyone, please take your seats—”

“You expect us to follow your instructions when you just tried to *murder* us?” Dream cried, interrupting the instructions.

“I said, *please take your seats* ,” Professor Borealis repeated, glaring at the blond.

Dream grumbled and plopped into his seat, bits of fire extinguisher powder raining down from his robes. When the second-years were all seated at their desks once more, their professor clapped her hands together and grinned, picking up the used fire extinguisher and displaying it to the class.

“What Mr. Davidson here used is called a *fire extinguisher* . Write it down. A brilliant Muggle invention, this is. It was invented in 1810 by George William Manby and, as you can probably tell by its name, it is used to extinguish fires. The powder within the extinguisher is a smothering agent, and is kept within this highly pressurized canister so that when it is released it lets out as a spray, the way Mr. Davidson has shown us—”

“Professor, is this thing even *safe*?” Minx cut in, grimacing at the powder that coated her hair and robes. George cringed as he realized that other than Professor Borealis, Minx seemed to have gotten the brunt of the extinguisher onslaught. *I’ll have to apologize for that later*, he thought to himself.

“Well, that depends for what, Miss Minx,” Borealis replied, setting the extinguisher down on her desk, “If you’re considering *consuming* the powder I’d advise against the idea, but if you’re trying to douse a fire I’d say it’s perfectly safe.”

“Obviously I’m not trying to *eat it* , I’m not stupid! This sh— this *stuff* looks nasty! Look at it!” She waved her arms about for emphasis, accidentally raining powder down on the student beside her, causing him to cringe and scoot away from the Slytherin.

“Wh—?! Don’t back away like *you’re* perfectly clean you *bastard* !” Minx huffed. “We both got snowed on thanks to genius-boy Ravenclaw over here!”

“Well, you’re *welcome* for not letting you burn alive!” George retorted indignantly.

“Well I’d *rather* have burned alive than have this spray-on dandruff all over me!” She spat.

“Professor, I can’t sit like this, I need to wash up right *now* .”

Professor Borealis considered the girl for a second before conceding. “I suppose your skin *can* become irritated if you let the residue sit for too long.” She then nodded towards the door and Minx scampered out of the classroom. The Slytherin girl slammed the door shut behind her, which only caused more powder to rain down on students from the ceiling.

Their teacher sighed. “Now, where were we...”

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Class was dismissed early so students could shower before lunch. Soon, everyone was crowded around the Ravenclaw table, discussing the newest Muggle Studies class.

“I’ve never wished to not know something as much as I wish to not know everything I’ve just been taught.” Dream groaned, his head slamming into the empty plate in front of him. “Why are Muggles so unnecessarily *complicated*?”

“Wow, *rude* ,” George rolled his eyes, reaching over Dream to get to the potatoes, “I never tell you how boring *your* world is.”

“That’s because my world *isn’t* boring. Also, you’re a nerd who *likes* to memorize magic stuff, so don’t even try to lie to me.”

“I’m not a—”

“I, for one, thought the lesson was wonderful, George,” Wilbur cut in. “Do Muggles *actually* have quills that replenish their own ink like the kind Professor Borealis had? What did she call them — pens?”

“Oh, yeah, I have one here actually—”

“Wilbur, did you get amnesia or somethin’?” Techno, remarked, pulling a yellow pen out of his robe pocket. “You *always* see me usin’ pens. Quills are the worst.”

Wilbur’s eyes lit up. “Oh! So *that’s* what that thing is! I’ve always wondered. The pen is simply a brilliant thing, isn’t it?” He asked, reaching for the pen and clicking its end curiously when Techno handed it to him.

“Uh, yeah, real genius,” Techno rolled his eyes, glancing at George as if to ask ‘ *can you believe these magic people?* ’

“How did you get your hands on one anyways?” Eret asked, eyeing the contraption over Wilbur’s shoulder.



“Uh, the dollar store?” Techno shrugged. “I don’t know man, does anyone ever actually *buy* pens? They just sorta show up around the house.”

“Wait, I thought Muggles didn’t have magic,” Wilbur said, narrowing his eyes at the pen. “How do these things appear out of nowhere, then, if Muggles can’t conjure them?”

“That—no. That’s not what I meant. Geez, guys, it’s just a *pen*. How do you have a fully-functionin’ society without pens?”

“You guys do know that you can charm quills to auto-fill, right? We’re doing perfectly fine without these stupid *pens*.” Dream grumbled, his face still planted into the plate.

“But, see, pens don’t *need* any fancy charms. How is it that Muggles have more advanced inventions than you wizard folk? What else don’t you guys have? Do you know what a tissue is? Water bottle? *Toothbrush*?”

“Wait wait wait, what do you mean by ‘you guys’?” Eret quirked his eyebrow, still staring intently at the clicking pen. “Your dad fought in the war, didn’t he? You’re a wizard.”

“Well, yeah, I’m a better wizard than all of you. I’m just not a pureblood.”

The pen stopped clicking and everyone turned to look at Techno with wide eyes.

“What?”

“You’re a MUGGLE-BORN?!” Eret spluttered, “But— but your DAD!”

Techno raised a questioning eyebrow. “I mean, yeah...he was a Muggle-born wizard...my mom’s a muggle — I’m sorry, what are we all confused about here?”

“Wh—?! Well how come you never told us?!” Wilbur asked.

“I thought I was all alone here!” George cried.

“Uh...guess I didn’t think my blood status was all that important. I mean, who cares? Does it even matter?”

Wilbur wrinkled his eyebrows. “Well, I suppose not—”

“Of COURSE it matters!” Eret screeched, pounding his fists against the table.

Dream flinched at the sudden outburst, looking up from the plate with an irritated glare. “Did you guys actually not know he had mostly No-Maj— er— Muggle parents?”

“They’re not *mostly Muggle*. One of my parents was a wizard and one isn’t,” Techno huffed.

“Yeah, but your dad was *fully* Muggle-born. He barely counts.”

Techno bristled at the comment and narrowed his eyes at the Slytherin. “And what the hell’s that supposed to mean exactly, Selwyn?”

“Nothing! It’s just that—”

“Hey guys!” A new voice interrupted and everyone’s necks snapped in its direction as the newcomer slid into an empty seat beside them. “What’s up?!” The new boy grinned, adjusting the white bandana on his forehead.

George's eyes lit up in recognition. "Oh, hey! You're the guy who Schlatt almost killed on the Hogwarts Express! Sapnap, was it?"

"That's me! Sucks that I didn't get into your House, right? You guys are really cool, especially Wilbur, he kinda saved my life," Sapnap chirped, scooping some food onto the plate in front of him. "So what're we all talkin' about?"

Dream narrowed his eyes at Sapnap. "What *we* were talking about is actually kinda none of your business."

Sapnap paused, spoon in mouth, before shrugging and swallowing the entire bite. "Alright then, fine, keep your secrets, it's whatever. I'll just tell you about what *I* was doing. Do you guys have any friends in Gryffindor?"

"Uh, not really." Eret muttered.

"I don't blame you. The second-years there are so *boring*. I have a friend in my House — he goes by Skeppy — he's also a first-year, and he's planning on pulling some HUGE prank on the Hufflepuffs. He already messed with one of the third-years there and it was *hilarious*. The guy's name is *literally* 'Bad.' A *Hufflepuff* named *Bad!* Isn't that the funniest thing you've ever heard?"

"Your friend was bothering Bad?" Dream sneered, looking like he wanted to wipe the new kid off the face of the earth.

"It was so funny! The dude kept calling him a muffin and stuff, and I'm pretty sure he almost cried when Skeppy threw himself off a moving staircase."

"*Cried* ?!" Dream's eye twitched and he gritted his teeth.

"Why would your friend throw himself off a movin' staircase? Is he stupid?" Techno snickered.

"Nah, there was another one coming up right underneath him, so it was really only like jumping down one step. The reaction from everyone else was *so* worth it." Sapnap grinned, shoveling more food into his mouth.

"I'd *pay* to see that happen again." Techno chuckled.

Dream stood up abruptly from the table, silverware clattering as he glared daggers at Sapnap. "I'm gonna go now. See you later, George."

"Okay, bye," Techno waved the Slytherin away before George could even reply. Dream stormed off, and Techno's attention quickly turned back towards Sapnap. "So what else is your friend plannin'? Think he needs an extra pair of hands?"

"Dude, he'd be *thrilled!* Come on, I'll introduce you!" Sapnap inhaled the rest of his lunch as he stood up, slamming the plate on the table before sprinting off to the Gryffindor table in search of his Housemate. "Follow me!"

"Well, boys, duty calls." Techno smirked, standing from his seat.

"Wait! Here's your pen back, I wouldn't want to take it from you," Wilbur said, presenting the pen in his outstretched palms like a sword.

Techno glanced down at the pen and then back up at Wilbur's reluctant face. "You know what? Keep it. Your birthday's September fourteenth, right? Think of it as an early birthday gift."

Wilbur's eyes shone with gratitude, "Really? No, I can't." but he was already tucking the pen away into his robes.

"I insist." And with that, he departed, chasing after the Gryffindor first-year.

Wilbur looked thrilled with his new present. "Can you believe I just got a *pen* ? Incredible! I'll have to save it for special occasions," Wilbur sighed.

"Lucky you." Eret muttered, glancing at Dream's empty plate before looking up at George.

George jerked his head towards the Hufflepuff table, where Dream was sitting beside Bad, laughing at something the third-year was saying.

"He'll be fine," the shorter boy told his roommate. Eret nodded, shoving a bite of food into his mouth as Wilbur rambled away about the wonders of pens.

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George was thankful that Ravenclaw had their Astronomy lessons on Fridays. It meant that he got to sleep in the following morning instead of having to chug caffeinated tea during breakfast. Late into Saturday morning, he woke to find that the rest of his roommates were still sleeping soundly in their four posters. Careful so as not to make much noise, he crept out of bed and picked up his student robe off the floor before throwing it on over his pajamas. With any luck, they would still be serving late breakfast (or even early lunch) in the Great Hall and he'd be able to grab a snack.

Downstairs in the common room, Philza was scrawling something onto a roll of parchment with a green pen. The prefect greeted George with a wave as the shorter boy approached him.

"Alright, George?"

"Yes, I'm fine. You're using a pen?" George asked, remembering the way Wilbur's had praised the Muggle invention the day before.

"Oh, yeah! Wil was goin' on and on about 'em, so I got Techno to donate me one," Phil said, grinning and clicking the end of the pen. "I have to say, I definitely see what all the fuss is about. This thing saves *massive* amounts of time, yeah? No need for all that ink dippin' and the blowin' it dry mess. Though it is a bit confusin', I thought the ink'd come out green, since that's what color the pen is, you know, but it came out blue, see?" He lifted the parchment up in front of him to show George the blue scrawl.

"Well, I can't really see green anyway because I'm colorblind, but there are *some* pens that write with green ink."

"Really? Well what color are they, then? If green pens have blue ink, do blue pens have green ink?"

"Er, no, it's different. If you buy a batch of colored pens in a shop, then all of the colors match up."

"That's just confusin'. If they're gonna switch things up, might as well stick to the pattern, right?"

George nodded, deciding it would take too much time to explain all the ins and outs of colored

stationary. "Right...what are you writing there, anyway?"

"Oh, just finishin' up the quidditch tryout announcement. I'll be postin' it up on the notice board after lunch. Are ya interested? You're a second-year now, so that means you can try out for our team."

George considered the sign in sheet for a moment before shaking his head. Quidditch was definitely *Dream's* thing, and as much as he liked hearing him go on about it, joining a sports team would only get in the way of George's studying. Plus, flying wasn't exactly his strong suit.

Philza shrugged and continued writing. "Well, in case you have a change of heart, the announcement'll be hangin' up here in the common room until tryouts are over. That means you've got two weeks to make up your mind, alright?"

"Got it." George nodded, though he doubted his mind would change anytime soon.

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"You *have* to change your mind, George," Dream insisted only a few minutes later during lunch.

George sighed and shook his head. "I fell off my broom during the final Flying exam last year. What makes you think I'll even be good enough to qualify?"

"George. Come on. You can't just *not* try out."

"I'm pretty sure tryouts are optional."

"Not for *you*, they're not! Slytherin and Ravenclaw are sharing the pitch for tryouts, so we'll get to be there together! C'mon, it'll be great!"

George shot Dream a withering look. "So you're saying I'd get to embarrass myself in front of *two* Houses? Even better."

"You won't embarrass yourself, Gogi," Dream was quick to reassure his friend. "I promise I'll train you every day leading up to it. By the end of these two weeks you'll be so good that they'll *have* to pick you!"

"I guess I'll try out if you want me to *that* badly. And *don't* call me that." George sighed, buttering another roll. He wasn't quite sure how Dream had managed to talk him into doing yet *another* stupid thing so soon after he'd made up his mind on the matter, but, well...

Slytherins were nothing if not persuasive.

"Yeah George, I'll be cheering you on from the stands!" piped in a new voice. A third boy was soon sliding into an empty seat beside them at the Ravenclaw table.

Dream and George glanced up from their lunch, staring at the first-year Gryffindor who had inserted himself into their conversation and was now filling up his plate.

The third boy paused when he noticed the silence, glancing up at the other two. "Uh, your name *is*

George, right?”

George nodded slowly. “Yeah...er, what are you doing here?”

“Having lunch, duh,” Sapnap said with an eye roll. “So, quidditch tryouts are coming up? That’s so cool! I’m totally gonna be trying out for my team next year. You two better give me a bunch of tips when you finish, okay?”

“Sure...” George trailed off, glancing up at Dream with his eyebrows raised.

“Oh, by the way, I apologized to Bad about the pranks we pulled on him the other day,” Sapnap said, assembling a monster burger on his plate as he nodded in Dream’s direction. “You seemed pretty mad about us bothering him, so I figured I should say something because Skeppy *definitely* wasn’t going to. Didn’t mean to start off on a bad foot with you, dude. To be fair, though, you pranked me *first*. ”

Dream huffed. “Technically, it was Schlatt who—”

“And technically, it was Skeppy. I was just the messenger. But anyway.....we cool?”

Dream glanced at George, and then back at the bright-eyed first-year. “We’re cool,” he conceded.

“Sweet.” Sapnap grinned and shoved the giant burger into his mouth.

“Anyways, George,” Dream said, redirecting the conversation back to quidditch. “We’re gonna have to train *extra* hard since you don’t have a broom of your own and your parents are Muggles, which means they won’t be able to get you one. *That* means you’ll have to use one of the school brooms, and they’re not really—”

“Ho pahe ha muhuh?!” Sapnap exclaimed, struggling to speak around his lunch.

George looked over at Sapnap in concern.

“He’s asking if your parents are Muggles,” Dream translated. When George shot him an equally concerned look, he added, “I learned how to speak ‘mouth full’ from Drista.”

The Ravenclaw relaxed in his seat. “Oh, uh, yeah. They are.”

Dream narrowed his eyes at Sapnap, tone suddenly challenging. “Is there a problem with that?”

Sapnap shook his head and swallowed, “No way! It’s cool, my dad’s a Muggle too! My parents are from America, and so am I, obviously, but over there No-Majs and wizards aren’t allowed to get married. You probably knew that already though, Dream, ‘cause you’re American, too, right?”

“Er, right—”

“It’s crazy!” Sapnap continued. “They’re hardly allowed to *talk* to each other or anything. It’s not even, like, a racist thing. MACUSA is just *super* paranoid about the Statute of Secrecy, and it *sucks*. My parents had to move here to get married without my mom having the wizard cops called on her.”

“Why didn’t they just go back to America after they got married? You coulda gone to Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. That’s where *my* mom went,” Dream supplied.

“Eh, they didn’t want me to go to a school where they promote segregation. It kinda sucks in a way ‘cause I have a friend back home in Texas who goes to Ilvermorny now, but Hogwarts is, like, the

best, so it all worked out in the end!”

“Wow...” George breathed. “I didn’t know there were different laws about magic in different places. I’ll have to read more about that.”

“Oh yeah, there are loads of different magic schools all over the place!” Sappnap continued, taking a smaller bite of his burger, “Like, there’s a French school called *Bow-Buttons* or something where this immortal dude used to study. Well, technically, he’s not immortal anymore, I guess, but he’s not dying of old age anytime soon, that’s for sure! And then there’s an African school where kids don’t use wands to do magic! When you think about it, wandless magic is *way* smarter, honestly, ‘cause wizards here are basically useless without their wands. But, hey, at least we look cooler, right?”

George blinked at the first-year as he processed all of the new information. Sappnap talked *a lot*. “Wait,” the Ravenclaw asked, “if you can’t interact with non-magical people in America, then what happens when a wizard is born to a Muggle family?”

“Nothing,” Dream supplied with a shrug before Sappnap could go off on another tangent. “Unless a wizard randomly adopts them and registers them with MACUSA, No-Maj-borns just get left to live their normal No-Maj lives. In most cases, the government thinks it’s too risky to reveal all of their magical secrets to No-Maj families. It’s just easier for everyone to keep the two worlds separate. And, when you think about it, it doesn’t really *hurt* the No-Maj-borns to be kept in the dark.”

Sappnap’s eyes widened and he nearly choked on his burger. “Dude! You can’t say stuff like that! What’s going on in America with magic is awful. Think about all the cool people we’re missing out on! Like, if George was from America, he wouldn’t have ever gotten the chance to do magic!”

George felt his heart tighten in his chest. He’d only been doing magic for a little bit over a year and yet he could hardly remember what life was like before Hogwarts.

*Lonely*, his brain supplied. *Before magic there was no Dream.*

“And *besides*, ” Sappnap continued, “what you said before about his No-Maj parents not being able to get him a broom is just *stupid* . My No-Maj dad is the one that got me *all* of my magical things! I think it’s the people who have been living *without* magic for half of their lives who can actually appreciate our world. To them, magic is like a cool fantasy thing, but to us it’s just normal.”

George snapped out of his thoughts and nodded vigorously. “Yeah, you know our owl, Ruby? Mum and Dad got her all by themselves while I was at school. Muggles aren’t *babies* , Dream.”

Dream tipped his head in acknowledgement, but his eyes were staring off into space. “I guess not...but just ‘cuz your Muggle background helps you ‘appreciate’ magic better than the rest of us doesn’t mean you’ll be any better at quidditch. Which means that we’re *still* gonna have to practice extra-hard, regardless of whether or not your parents get you a broom.”

George sighed and went back to eating his lunch, staring off towards the Professors’ table while Sappnap flicked a pickle at Dream over his shoulder. As a mini food fight ensued over his head, George noticed that Professor Borealis was staring intently at Professor Travers. The Muggle Studies professor quickly looked away when Travers caught her gaze, however.

*That’s odd*, George thought as he watched Travers smile to herself and go back to her lunch.

Suddenly, a glob of ketchup smacked into the side of his face and all three boys froze. Dream and Sappnap glanced at George, then at each other.

“Scatter!” Sappap yelled, prompting them both to turn tail in opposite directions, leaving George with the condiment dripping down his cheek and a mess all over the table. If nothing else, he certainly felt bad for the school’s caretaker.

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“Welcome to Defense Against the Dark Arts!” Professor Travers called out from the front of the classroom, smiling at all the students before her. “Your previous Professor, Professor Chang, had to leave due to unforeseen circumstances. From what I’ve heard, she was a wonderful teacher. I know I have very big shoes to fill, so I hope I do not disappoint you.”

Dream bounced up and down excitedly at his desk and George gave him a funny look; he didn’t think Dream had hated Chang all *that* much, but he supposed that their former professor must’ve been pretty hard for the Slytherin to get along with due to her own personal history.

“Now,” their new professor continued, “I’m *officially* listed on your time tables as Professor Travers, but you lot can simply call me Professor Aurora. I’m sure that most of you are likely already familiar with my family name, so you can imagine why I’d prefer my given one, can’t you?” she chuckled.

George noticed that Eret was shifting uncomfortably in his seat. Only Dream laughed appreciatively along with her.

“Right, tough crowd, are we?” she said, clasping her hands together. “That’s alright, it’s a bit of a touchy subject, and I know that not all of us are, erm, *well versed* in magical history, so let’s move on, shall we?”

The class nodded.

"Great! I would love to get to know a bit more about my lovely students, so let's start with an easy question, yes? What's everyone's favorite magical creature?"

Everyone's hands shot up and Professor Aurora grinned, her eyes widening in surprise when she spotted George's raised hand.

"Mr. Davidson, aren't you a Muggle-born?" she asked, sounding somewhat impressed. "I'm quite surprised that you have a favorite magical creature already. Care of Magical Creatures isn't even *offered* to second-years. When did you learn about them?"

"Uh, well, we learned about some last year, and I did some reading on my own, you know..." he trailed off, glancing down at the Ravenclaw crest on his school uniform.

Professor Aurora followed his gaze and smiled when she registered the blue lining of his robes. "Of course! A Ravenclaw, studious as ever," she remarked, smiling brightly. "Please, tell us, what *is* your favorite magical creature? Wait, no, let me guess: is it a dragon?"

"Er, well—"

"It is, isn't it? That's always the case with Muggle-borns, I've found. It must've been so exciting for you when these beasts you thought were fictitious suddenly became reality, right?"

"Well yes, but actually my favorite magical creature is—"

"Yes, Dream! You raised your hand first, I think. What's *your* favorite magical creature?"

"The dementor!" the blond grinned.

George would've been upset at having been cut off if he weren't so surprised at Professor Aurora's use of the name 'Dream'. None of the professors *ever* referred to Dream as anything other than 'Mr. Selwyn' or 'Clay,' and the nickname seemed to give a pause to the rest of his classmates as well. Dream seemed totally unperturbed by it, however, as the professor praised his choice.

"Dementors are actually classified as non-being due to the fact that they are amortal, but I'll allow it. Quite the terrifying bunch, aren't they? Do any of you know of the time when dementors used to dwell around Hogwarts?"

The class murmured in affirmation, some mentioning parents or older siblings who've had to deal with them. Professor Aurora nodded along with the class, pausing when she reached George.

"Ah, it seems not *all* of us are aware of this fact, are we? That's alright, I wouldn't have expected it from you, anyways." She smiled sympathetically at George before continuing, "Since Dream has provided us with such an interesting creature, I believe it should be the very *first* we study. Though dementors aren't extensively covered in our curriculum until Year Six, we can have a brief introduction to them in this lesson. How does that sound?"

The Slytherins cheered.

"Very good! Open up your textbooks to the chapter on dementors, it should be listed in the table of contents, you see? Now, who knows what spell is used to defend against dementors?"

Everyone's hands shot up and Professor Aurora chuckled, "Very well then, out with it, all of you."

"Expecto Patronum!"

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"Isn't Aurora just great?" Dream sighed, plopping into the seat beside George at the lunch table.

"You're pretty casual with her, I noticed. What's up with that?" George asked.

"Oh yeah, she called you *Dream* back in class, didn't she?" Wilbur added, "When did you even have the time to tell her about your nickname?"

"Oh, Aurora's a family friend! The Travers and Selwyn families have always been good buddies."



“Yeah, friends who commit war crimes together, stay together,” Eret muttered.

Dream rolled his eyes. “Aurora’s not like that at *all* . She’s cool!”

“She didn’t seem all that ‘cool’ when she kept interrupting me and excluding me from the conversation in class,” George said pointedly, reaching for a roll.

“Relax, Gogi, she wasn’t doing it on *purpose*. She’s always been really careful about the whole Muggle-born thing, especially with how racist the *rest* of the people in our families are. You know, *she’s* the one who taught me that Muggles aren’t people we should *hate*, they’re people we should *pity*.”

The entire table paused. Wilbur stared at Dream with his eyebrows raised so high they almost disappeared into his hairline, while Techno slapped Eret between his shoulder blades when the other Ravenclaw nearly choked on a piece of lettuce.

George was first to break the silence. “Ex *cuse* me?!” he spluttered. “Did you just say *pity*? ”

“What kind of garbage are you spewing here, Dream?” an increasingly familiar voice inserted itself into the conversation. “Who the hell says that kind of stuff?”

“Well...shouldn’t we pity them? I mean, they have no magic, you kinda can’t *help* but feel bad for them.”

“Nah, buddy, you’re going about it all wrong.” Sapnap shook his head, stuffing a roll into his mouth. “Using words like ‘pity’ is actually really...rude.”

“ *Condescendin’* is what it is , ” Techno supplied.

“Yeah, *that’s* the word! It’s condescending.” Sapnap nodded, still chewing his first roll as he struggled to tear open a second one with his fingers. “Just because Muggles don’t have *magic* doesn’t mean you have to feel bad for them. I mean, they don’t know what life *with* magic is like so it doesn’t affect them, you know? They function perfectly fine *without* magic, so what’s the point in feeling bad for them?”

“Gimme that,” Techno muttered, grabbing the roll from Sapnap’s hand and slicing it open with a knife.

“Thanks,” the Gryffindor grinned, picking a piece of cheese off the platter before continuing. “If we were living in a world where you could *only* go from place to place by apparating, or one where magical creatures just flew around attacking people, or where the No-Maj had no technology to let them do basic things, *then* we could feel bad. But we helped make a world for No-Maj people where they don’t *need* to worry about not having magic.”

Dream sat silently and chewed his bottom lip, deep in thought as Sapnap stuffed way too much cheese into his mouth.

“Besides,” Wilbur added, “Muggles invented all sorts of really interesting things without the help of magic. Like this!” He paused to pull out his yellow pen with a flourish. “God, what a brilliant invention.”

“Muggles are more technologically advanced than wizards give ‘em credit for. S’about time for all these magic folk to get off their high horse and start *usin’* some of this cool stuff.” Techno grumbled, “I can’t believe you’ve *seriously* been livin’ without pens this entire time.”

“Did you think we just *chose* to use quills all the time?!” Wilbur exclaimed, holding the pen delicately in his hands. “Why the bloody hell would we do that if we had *these* ?!”

“I dunno, for the cool *aesthetic* ?”

“You think *I* would do something for the ‘aesthetic’?” Wilbur scoffed.

Techno stayed silent and stared at the other Ravenclaw blankly. “Do....do you *want* me to answer that?”

“Alright, fine, but I’d sacrifice aesthetics for something like *this* ,” he grumbled, clicking the pen for emphasis.

“ *I* use quills sometimes even though I have pens,” George remarked.

“Well you are a *fool* , Gogi, an absolute fool.” Wilbur clicked his pen once more and sighed softly. “I think I’m in love with it.”

“ *Oh* -kay then, that’s my cue to leave,” Techno said, standing from his seat. “I think I’m gonna go talk strategy with Skeppy about his prank or somethin’, just...gonna go be anywhere *but* here.”

“Technoblade, has a Muggle ever married an inanimate object?”

“ *Not* answerin’ that, ask Sapnap,” he called over his shoulder, already halfway across the Great Hall.

Sapnap grinned. “Am I really smart enough to be the ‘ask him’ guy here? Wow. I’m honored.”

“Nah, I think it’s just because you talk the most,” Dream snickered.

“Ha! Better talk a lot then talk a lot of *nonsense* , amirite? Anyway, Dream, I’m serious. You’re really nice but you’re going about Muggles all wrong.”

Dream nodded, his shoulders sagging. “Yeah...I’ll think about it.”

“Good, stay woke.”

“ *Woke* ?” Wilbur asked, looking up from the pen momentarily.

“You don’t know what woke means?! Oh *boy* , I have so much to teach you!” Sapnap clasped his hands together and cleared his throat. “Alright, so in Muggle culture it’s appropriate to address every group of girls with the phrase ‘hey mamas’ when you first see ‘em, got it?”

“Wait! Should I be taking notes?”

“Yes! Put that pen to use!”

“NOT with the pen. *Never* the pen. The pen is for special occasions and emergencies.”

“Alright, got it, no pen, but write it down, okay? ‘Hey mamas’. Repeat it!”

“Hey mamas!” Wilbur echoed dutifully.

George stifled a snicker and rolled his eyes, glancing in Dream’s direction. The Slytherin seemed to be deep in thought, however, so George left the blond to his devices and simply listened to Sapnap corrupt Wilbur’s vocabulary. George was so immersed in the absurdity of the conversation

that he didn't notice Eret slowly slinking away from the group and disappearing into the mess of the Great Hall.

## Chapter End Notes

According to AO3 statistics, only a small percentage of readers actually leave kudos. If you enjoyed this update, please consider leaving kudos and a comment. It's free and it lets us know we should keep writing!

## Chapter Nine || Year Two

### Chapter Summary

Quidditch tryouts commence.

### Chapter Notes

!Content warning! Descriptions of a graphic injury. If that stuff upsets you, skip from "...are you asking me?" to "He tore his eyes away from the scene."

Heyyo everybody thanks for being patient! Here's the ninth installment of this fic ^\_^ for some reason this chapter was just hard to write + Gra55 and I have been busy with college applications/college itself. Another reason why this took a bit longer is that Gra55 went through and EDITED THE FIRST FOUR CHAPTERS FOR ME!!!! Woooo!!!! They write a brilliant Techno and changed a bunch of dialogue, so that's something to keep in mind if you end up rereading this ever :))))))

All that being said, enjoy the update!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As it turned out, Dream had not been joking when he'd promised to train George every day before quidditch tryouts. The very next day after that initial discussion, a loud knocking sound woke George from his sleep at five in the morning.

"Bloody *hell*, George, who's sending you mail this early?" grumbled Wilbur, covering his ears with his pillow to muffle the noise. Sure enough, George quickly discovered that the cause of the commotion was an owl pecking incessantly at the window above his bed.

"Dunno," George replied sleepily, sitting up and opening the window before the owl could wake up Eret or Techno.

The bird deposited the letter on George's bedside table with a hoot. George closed the window once the owl had taken off again and then squinted at the print on the front of the envelope. Frustratingly, George couldn't decipher the writing on the recipient line.

"Um...Wilbur?" George said quietly to his roommate. Wilbur groaned in lieu of a response.

"Sorry to bother you, but could you tell me what it says on the front of this envelope?"

Wilbur rolled over and squinted at George in the dim light of the early morning. "Mmmph, pass it over," he mumbled.

Wilbur reached into his bedside drawer and put on his glasses with a huff of annoyance, accepting the letter from George's hands and bringing it close to his face. After a moment, Wilbur rolled his eyes.

“No wonder you couldn’t read it. Some idiot decided to write to a person with red-green colorblindness using green ink on a red envelope.”

*Oh. That explains it,* George thought to himself. Wilbur paused as he took in the address line, then gasped and tossed the letter back on George’s bed.

“Gogi, your letter just burned my hand. Open the window. Now. And throw that thing out,” Wilbur hissed.

“Why?” George asked, puzzled, noticing that the envelope was beginning to emit thin trails of smoke.

“Your bastard of a best friend sent you a howler. Quick, throw it out before—”

Suddenly, the envelope exploded. A booming voice echoed throughout the room, causing Eret and Techno to jump out of their beds.

“GOOD MORNING, GEORGE! RISE AND SHINE! THE QUIDDITCH PITCH SHOULD BE EMPTY NOW, WHICH MEANS IT’S TIME FOR US TO PRACTICE! MEET ME THERE AT FIVE-THIRTY!”

All four Ravenclaw roommates had their hands covering their ears. After the message ended, Technoblade looked murderous.

“I’m gonna *kill* Selwyn,” he growled. “Who sends someone a *howler* at five in the mornin’?”

“Someone *very* enthusiastic about quidditch,” George replied, still in shock.

“Just shut up and let me *sleep*,” Eret pleaded, pulling his blanket up over his chin. Wilbur nodded and waved his hand at George.

“Get out, Gogi, and please tell Dream he’s a proper git when you see him, yeah?” the curly-haired boy said as he settled back into bed.

George briefly entertained the idea of ignoring the letter altogether, but, knowing Dream, the Slytherin probably had enough howlers at his disposal to wake the entire castle. So, with bleary eyes and a blooming headache, George changed into his athletic wear and descended the stairs of Ravenclaw Tower.

It was so early that George didn’t even know if he was *allowed* to be walking the halls of the castle yet. Thankfully, no one else was crazy enough to be out of bed that morning, so George passed through the castle unnoticed by all except a girl in one of the portraits on the first floor, who stuck her tongue out at him as he passed by.

Once he stepped out onto the pitch, George could see the faint outline of Dream doing stretches in the distance. The Slytherin had the audacity to *grin* when he saw George approaching.

“Good morning, Georgie! Didja get my letter?” the blond asked cheerfully.

George glared and imagined punching his friend’s freckled face. It was a satisfying mental image.

“I would’ve waited ‘till after school,” Dream continued, seemingly unbothered by George’s death glare, “but everyone’s gonna be out here at that time, so I figured we should practice before it gets crowded. I borrowed one of our prefect’s keys to unlock the broom closet, so remind me to give it back once we’re done.”

George yawned and glanced down at the broom by his friend's feet. It was one of the school's better spare brooms, a Cleansweep Six. The wood at the top of the handle was a bit splintered, but the broomstick was otherwise perfectly rideable. George wouldn't be able to fly nearly as fast as Dream, whose dad had bought him a Firebolt over the summer, but George had never been a fan of fast flying, anyway.

A thought occurred to George, then. "Wait," he said to Dream, "one of your prefects let you *borrow* a key? Isn't that against the rules?"

Dream smirked and mounted his broom. "She doesn't exactly *know* that I borrowed it."

George blanched. "Are you *insane* ? Do you know how much trouble we'll be in if—"

"Last one to the other side of the pitch is a rotten egg!"

"*Dream* !"

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When Dream had first told George that wizards *actually* fly around on broomsticks, the Muggle-born had been excited to experience flight for himself. He'd imagined himself flying over London like a bird and seeing millions of people reduced to tiny ants from above. In his imagination, flying was fun, exhilarating, and effortless.

His daydreams were shattered in his first year at Hogwarts when he discovered a heartbreaking fact: flying was *hard*.

Summoning the broom and kicking off the ground wasn't too difficult, but actually *balancing* well enough to stay airborne was another feat entirely. Unlike a bicycle, brooms did not come with comfortable leather seats or training wheels; the thin cylinder of wood on which one was expected to sit did not leave any room for error. Even the slightest accidental shift could send the whole broom veering sharply off-course, something George had learned the hard way in his first year.

Luckily, though, George prided himself on being able to learn things quickly. He was a dedicated student, and even though flying hadn't exactly come *naturally* to him, hard work and practice helped him go from complete incompetence to slightly below-average ability in just over eight months.

By the end of their first early-morning training session, George had only fallen off his broom once. Thanks to the Ravenclaw's refusal to fly any faster than forty-five kilometers an hour, he was able to finish his first training relatively unscathed.

Unlike George, Dream apparently had no reservations when it came to flying fast. In between the occasional motivational shout, the blond spent *his* training session flying in circles around the Ravenclaw, attempting sharp turns and swerves and all sorts of daring maneuvers that made George sick to his stomach. Dream handled his broom in a way that made it look effortless; the taller boy was a natural flyer. George would've bet his wand on his best friend making the Slytherin team if it weren't for one small detail.

"Hey, Dream?" George called out from his vantage point about six meters above the ground.

“Gimme a sec!” Dream shouted before executing a flawless spin on his Firebolt. The blond turned and looked up at George triumphantly, prompting the shorter boy to roll his eyes. *Bloody show-off.*

“It’s been almost ninety minutes and you’ve barely flown higher than two meters. Why don’t you come up to the goalposts?” the Ravenclaw asked curiously.

Dream just blinked up at him and tilted his head. “What do you mean?”

George raised one eyebrow and then pointedly looked up at the three large hoops positioned high above their heads. Dream followed his gaze, then gasped.

“Wait, *those* are the goalposts?!”

George snorted in disbelief. “Uh, yes.”

Dream’s face visibly paled. The boy looked like he’d seen a ghost.

“B-but...they’re so high up!” the Slytherin stammered eventually, gaping at the hoops high above his head.

“Yeah, they’re ten meters above the ground. I read about the pitch dimensions in *Quidditch Through the Ages*.”

Dream guided his broom up higher, bit-by-bit, until he and George were at the same elevation. The blond looked as if he was about to faint.

“Dream, are you alright?” George asked, concern for his friend coloring his voice.

“W-we’re so high up,” Dream stammered.

George looked down at the ground below. Sure, a fall from this height would definitely hurt, but Madame Abbott could fix a broken leg in minutes. They weren’t anywhere near high enough yet; the goalposts were still meters above their heads.

“We don’t have to fly all the way up there if you don’t want to,” George offered. “It’s alright if you don’t feel well.”

“I didn’t know...I didn’t think quidditch was played so high above the ground...” Dream trailed off.

George couldn’t help but snort. “Weren’t you at any of the House matches last year? The Slytherin team made the semifinals.”

“I...no, I didn’t go to any of the games. Something always came up.”

“I thought you were a quidditch fan.”

“In my defense, people don’t really *play* quidditch in America, they play quodpot. And quodpot is played *a lot* closer to the ground.”

“...Right. No offense, Dream, but you look like you’re going to faint. Would you like to land now?”

Dream swallowed audibly and glanced down at the pitch below. Immediately, the other boy’s eyes widened and he wobbled a bit on his broom.

“Oh god oh god oh *god*” the blond breathed, shutting his eyes and gripping the handle of his

broom so tightly that all the color drained from his fingers. George felt a pang of concern for his best friend, who was *obviously* very distressed.

“Er, calm down, Dream. Let’s just *slowly* lower ourselves,” George encouraged his friend while bringing his own broom closer to the ground with his magic. “That’s it. See? It’s not so bad.”

Dream didn’t say a word until both of his feet were planted firmly on the ground. Once he was no longer airborne, the Slytherin dismounted his Firebolt and took a seat on the grass with a huff.

“So...you’re afraid of heights?” George asked, walking up to his friend and taking a seat beside him. “You never told me.”

“‘Cuz it’s *embarrassing*.”

“If you don’t like flying, then why would you want to try out for the quidditch team?”

Dream’s eyes snapped up to George’s. “I *love* flying. Back in Florida, I played quodpot with my cousins all the time.”

George hummed thoughtfully. “You *are* fast on your Firebolt.”

“Fast? Oh, c’mon. I’m the *fastest*. You saw me! I can even make turns with no hands!”

“Has anyone ever told you you’re an insufferable show-off?”

Dream rolled his eyes at that and elbowed George in the side. “You’re just jealous.”

“Of you? God, no.”

They sat in silence for a few moments, just watching the sun rise above the Scottish hillside. George didn’t need full colorvision to know that the sight was beautiful.

“You know,” Dream said after a while, “you really aren’t bad, considering you’ve only been flying since last year. You’ve got good grip and a natural sense of direction. All we gotta do is work on your balance.”

“Thanks,” George replied, cheeks warming at the compliment. He hoped Dream wouldn’t notice the way he blushed in response to the praise, or at the very least he hoped that the taller boy would attribute it to their earlier exertion.

George couldn’t help his reactions; his expressiveness made him an open book. He was easily flustered. His teachers in primary school had called him *modest*. *Sensitive*, his mother had always said. His bullies had called him a *wimp* and a *bootlicker* and a *namby-pamby* and all sorts of other horrid names he didn’t like to remember, but Dream? Dream just called him by his name. Well, sometimes Dream called him a *nerd*, but it never felt like a label.

Perhaps that’s why compliments from Dream always meant more.

“You aren’t half bad, yourself,” George replied. “But you’re going to have to fly higher than two meters if you want to make the quidditch team.”

Dream went quiet again and stared off into the distance. “I know,” he said softly, picking at a loose thread on his sleeve. It was then George decided to lighten the mood.

“You smell horrid,” the Ravenclaw teased, scrunching his nose in mock-disgust. “Let’s head back to the dormitories so you can have a shower.”

Dream scoffed and stood up, picking up his Firebolt as he did so. “As if *you* smell any better, Gogi.”

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The next two weeks passed in a sleepless blur.

George trained with Dream every morning without fail, and while the Ravenclaw *did* sense that they were both improving, the fact remained that each boy was making little progress on overcoming his respective hurdle. George still refused to fly fast, and Dream still refused to fly high.

It was probably for this reason that the team tryouts had gone so terribly for them.

On the day of the tryouts, George could not stop thinking about all the things he could have been doing instead on a nice Saturday afternoon. *I could be studying*, he thought to himself. *I could be doing that Charms essay I have due on Monday*, *I could be sleeping*, *I could be not wanting to vomit in front of the entire school right now*.

There were far too many people in the stands considering how these tryouts were only for two Houses, in his opinion. He didn't think Sapnap had been serious about coming to cheer him on, however the Gryffindor had not only painted his face in color shifting paint, but he had also brought signs to support both him and Dream. To George's dismay, it also appeared that he'd forced what looked to be the entire first-year student body to tag along with him.

“You got this George!” Sapnap yelled as he caught his gaze. George couldn't tell if he had used a voice amplifying charm to carry his screams across the pitch or if Sapnap was just naturally that loud.

“Oh my *god*.” Dream snickered when he spotted the over enthusiastic boy in the crowd.

“Woah, you've already got an entire fanclub, huh Dream?” asked a second-year Slytherin with half white-half black hair, polishing his broomstick behind them. George vaguely recognized the boy as one of Dream's roommates, but he couldn't quite remember the other boy's name.

“Jealous?” Dream smirked, turning to his roommate with his hands on his hips, “I don't see anyone up there for *you*.”

“You're not special, okay, calm down,” the boy said with a roll of his eyes, “I made nice with a first-year too. Their entire year didn't just come here for *you*, alright?”

“Wow, *a* first-year? One whole entire first-year? That's *insane*, you're crazy!”

“Oh, quit pretendin' like any of the kids up there actually know who you are,” a familiar voice snorted. “Those are all jus' Sapnap's friends. I'm willin' to bet my wand that those children wish they were anywhere *but* here right now.”

“Techno?” George gasped. “What are you doing here?”

Techno raised an eyebrow at him, “Uh, last time I checked, quidditch tryouts were happenin' here. Did I get the address wrong?”

“No, I mean, why?”

“*Why* am I doin’ here? That’s grammatically incorrect, George—”

“You know what I mean!”

“Well, it’s pretty self-explanatory, isn’t it? I’m at quidditch tryouts to try out for quidditch. Are you *sure* you’re a Ravenclaw?” He asked as the Slytherin boy snickered behind him.

“Yeah, even *I* got it, dude.” He said, pointing a greased up towel at himself.

“But you never said anything about trying out!” George spluttered, ignoring the jab at him. “You knew I was practicing this whole time with Dream. Why didn’t you join us?”

“Uh, no offense, but I think most of us would rather serve detention with *Filch* than practice quidditch with Dream,” the Slytherin boy cut in, flicking a strand of white hair out of his face.

“Yeah, what he said,” Techno nodded before voicing a question George himself had wanted to ask.

“Uh, sorry if this comes across as rude, but who’re you again?”

“Oh, I see, Dream doesn’t need an introduction but *I* do, huh? What am I, some random side character?”

“No, Dream just plops himself down at my lunch table every day, so I’m kinda *forced* to know him,” Techno rolled his eyes. “Here, I’ll go first. You can call me Techno.”

The boy looked the Ravenclaw up and down before shrugging. “Fine, my name’s Andrew Gémure-Boye—”

“The *Eightieth* !” Dream interrupted.

“Eightieth?!” George cried, his eyes widening.

“I was *getting* to that,” the Slytherin glared at the blond. “The Gémure-Boye family has a philosophy: if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it. Mine’s a tried and true name, even if it’s a bit overused. On the bright side, GB80 is a pretty sick nickname, right?”

“Wow, nicknames based off of *actual* names? Haven’t heard one-a those in a while,” Techno said, staring pointedly at Dream, who rolled his eyes in response.

“Woah there, don’t pull me into your random drama,” GB80 held his hands up in mock surrender, “*you* don’t have to sleep in the same room as this guy. I’m trying to keep my beef strictly with people who *don’t* have access to my unconscious body.”

“I can respect that.”

“I appreciate it.”

“I’m still wondering who the hell is up there for you.” Dream said, scanning the stands while carefully avoiding Sapnap’s gaze. The Gryffindor boy would not stop jumping up and down and waving his arms. A few of the other first-years who George didn’t even recognize were holding signs with his and Dream’s names on them, much to their embarrassment.

“Wouldn’t *you* like to know, Mr. Popular,” GB80 smirked, running the towel one final time over his broomstick before throwing it over his shoulder and completely missing the dirty towel bin.

Dream glanced down at the towel, and then back up at his roommate, “Uh, yeah, that’s why I asked—”

“Alright everyone! Let’s get settled!” The Ravenclaw captain called out. George recognized her as one of the students in Philza’s year. “We’re gonna start off by flying some laps around the pitch. Anyone who isn’t off the ground in the next minute is out!”

“Guess the universe wants it to stay a secret,” the Slytherin shrugged, “I’ll see you out there, boys.” With that, GB80 mounted his broom and flew off towards the stands, causing the spectating Slytherins to erupt into cheers.

“You’d think the Holyhead Harpies had walked on there with all the noise they’re makin’,” Techno huffed, “Good luck out there, guys.”

“I won’t be needing any *luck*,” Dream tsked, “I’m gonna get in through pure talent.”

“Yeah, you sure like keepin’ things pure,” Techno snickered.

“Oh come *on* !” Dream cried as Techno sped off on his broom, leaving the other two in the dust, “That wasn’t funny!”

“He didn’t mean anything by it,” George assured him, “You just gave him a really good opportunity.”

“Oi, Selwyn! Davidson! Are you here for spots on your quidditch teams or are you here for a chat?” Madame Hooch called out from the side of the pitch.

The boys shared an exasperated glance before lifting off in unison, though Dream quickly whizzed ahead on his Firebolt, leaving George trailing behind the group of students. Apart from Techno, only one other Ravenclaw in George’s year was trying out: Adele Robinson, a quiet girl with whom he didn’t interact much aside from when they both happened to get stuck outside the common room door and had to work together to solve the knocker’s riddle. For the most part, only older students had showed up to the tryouts.

After about five minutes of flying in circles, the Ravenclaw and Slytherin captains landed gracefully in the center of the pitch. One by one, students followed suit, eventually forming a wide circle. George was among the last to descend and stumbled a bit when it came time to dismount, but, luckily, no one seemed to notice. Everyone else had their eyes trained on the captains in the center of the circle.

“Alright, listen here,” the Slytherin captain announced, putting one hand on her hip. “If you don’t know already, I’m Vivian Vovchuk, Seeker and Captain of the Slytherin quidditch team. This is my final year at this school and my last chance to win the Quidditch Cup, so I’m looking for winners today. Slytherin’s in need of a Chaser and a Beater to replace Lee and Stevens, and I’ll also be recruiting a backup Seeker to take my place after I graduate. I’ll let Eloise here introduce herself, and then we’ll begin.”

The Ravenclaw captain nodded and cleared her throat. “Thanks, Vivian. My name’s Eloise McNairy and I play Chaser. This is my first year as Ravenclaw Captain. We have openings for Chaser and Keeper, so the Ravenclaw tryouts will likely center on goalkeeping and scoring.”

A few of the Ravenclaws nodded at the information, likely contemplating the available positions. George hadn’t even *known* which positions were vacant until that moment, so he had absolutely no clue which one to go for. He gripped the handle of his borrowed broom nervously and hoped his

ignorance wouldn't put him at *too* much of a disadvantage.

"For the first two hours or so, Slytherin and Ravenclaw will be practicing on opposite ends of the pitch," Vivian informed everyone. "During this phase of the trials we'll be eliminating a lot of you. After the first phase, we'll have our finalists play in a friendly Slytherin vs. Ravenclaw practice match."

"Easy," GB80 snickered, prompting a Ravenclaw fourth-year to smack him lightly on the head with a broom in response.

"For the first phase of the tryouts, we're going to be assessing your passing skills," Vivian continued, ignoring the interruption. "For this round, I want everyone to pair off and split up according to your Houses. Once you have a partner I need you to grab a quaffle from the quaffle bin, take off, and start passing! If I catch anyone faffing around aimlessly, you'll be automatically disqualified, ye hear?"

The Slytherin students immediately split off into pairs and began to nab quaffles from the bin. George saw Dream fly off with GB80 to begin the passing drill. Soon, only Ravenclaws remained on the ground.

"Right," Eloise said loudly, "Ravenclaws will be doing the same exercise. Find a pair, grab a quaffle, and take off. I'll be coming around with some of the other members of our team to examine your technique, so you better stay focused! Start now!"

George scanned the other Ravenclaw students on the pitch, looking for someone non-intimidating and preferably in his own year. Unfortunately, Techno had already paired up with a fourth-year and was well on his way to the opposite end of the pitch, which left George with only one other second-year option.

"Erm, Adele?" he asked the Ravenclaw girl, tapping her on the shoulder. She turned around and met him with a curious gaze.

"Alright, George?"

"Er, yes. I was wondering, well..." he broke off, gesturing to the other students flying around them, "do you have a partner yet?"

Thankfully, Adele shook her head and smiled. "Not yet. Want to pair up?"

George nodded gratefully and jogged up to the quaffle bin. Only the scuffed ones were left by then, but he supposed they'd work for the simple exercise. Quaffle in hand, George mounted his broom and shakily flew it back towards his partner. He almost lost his balance when an older Ravenclaw boy veered sharply in front of him to catch a wayward quaffle, but through sheer luck and prayer, he managed to right himself and stay airborne.

About three seconds into the passing activity, George discovered that Adele had a *very* strong throw. Her first pass hit him straight in the chest and nearly knocked the wind out of him.

"Are you alright?" she had called out immediately afterwards, concerned.

"Yes! Perfectly fine!"

Refocusing, George tried to put as much force into his own throw as he could. He gripped the leather ball with both hands and held it above his head, arching his arms backwards slightly for momentum. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the Ravenclaw captain approaching on her

Nimbus 2001.

George took a deep breath and threw the leather ball. It made it about halfway to Adele before it lost momentum and began to fall towards the ground.

“Sorry!” George said, embarrassed, as the girl dove down expertly to retrieve it.

“No worries!”

When his partner was back in position, Eloise paused in front of her and complimented her throw. The captain didn’t say anything to George, however.

As the passing exercise continued, George knew he would have to be bolder if he wanted to catch the Ravenclaw captain’s eye. So, when he saw that one of Adele’s throws was headed too far to his right, he yanked the handle of his broom to one side and sped off to catch the quaffle.

Unfortunately for George, his borrowed broomstick was splintered from years of use. The right side of the wooden handle had a single jagged edge that no one had bothered to repair before tryouts, and it was this jagged edge that slashed open the Ravenclaw’s right hand when he gripped his broom handle to make the turn.

A sharp pain shot through George’s hand, causing him to instinctively recoil and clutch his injury. Unfortunately, this motion left him struggling to regain his balance with only one hand available to steady himself on his broom. George leaned forward and brought his legs closer to his body in a last-ditch attempt to remain airborne, but it was too late to correct the balancing error.

The next several seconds passed in slow motion. George heard Adele shout his name in a panicked voice just as his broom took a nosedive and he started falling headfirst. In a desperate effort to avoid a straight-on collision with the ground, George channeled all his magic into the hand still holding the broom handle.

Fortunately, he did not crash into the ground. Unfortunately, he *did* crash into the stands.

His right side took the brunt of the impact, sending a wave of numbing shock throughout his body as he tumbled into the audience. Gasping for air, he bolted upright to assess the damage, panic seizing him as the movement caused his head to swim and his vision to blur. He collapsed against the stands again, supporting his body on one of the benches.

He vaguely registered a hand tapping lightly on his shoulder. Someone was speaking to him, but he couldn’t hear much over the blood rushing in his ears. It took a few moments for the voice to finally sink in.

“...okay, George? George?! Can you hear me?!”

The Ravenclaw blinked open his eyes and tried to focus on the face looming over him. “S-Sapnap?” he stammered.

“Oh thank *everything* — he’s conscious, Professor Aurora!” Sapnap called out to someone nearby. As the stars began to fade from George’s vision, a bit of the feeling returned to his leg.

“Is it...raining?” the second-year asked, feeling a warm wetness against his robes.

“Uh, yes? No. Just, ho boy— George— oh god. Just lie back down, alright? Um, or don’t! Wait, don’t, no, you shouldn’t fall asleep, that’s a concussion, right? Just hang tight, Abbott’ll be here in a minute, and you probably don’t want to see—”

George blinked blearily at the instructions, glancing down at his leg as Sapnap rambled on. He squinted at the appendage, or rather, the place where it was *supposed* to be. Despite his vision being blurred, he was sure that an entire limb would at least be somewhat visible.

“Um...Sapnap?” He croaked, interrupting the boys panicked yammering, “Where’s my leg?”

The Gryffindor grimaced and coughed nervously, averting his gaze from where the leg should’ve been, “Well, uh, ha! Funny story actually! Well, not really. It's not funny. Um....It’s there, I promise, nothing Madame Abbott can't fix, right?”

“...are you asking me?”

“N-No! I'm telling you, it's fine, it'll *be* fine at least, it's just, you know....bent the wrong way? It's no big deal, I swear, I've gotten worse injuries from the playground! No I haven't. That's a lie. You'll be fine though.”

“Bent the wrong way? What do you — *oh.* ”

When George was seven, he’d broken his arm by falling off the monkey bars. It had only been a small fracture, just *barely* visible on the X-ray, so the doctors had given him a cast and sent him off on his way. It had taken about a month to heal, but George’s arm had been good as new once the cast was removed.

Unlike when he was seven, George didn’t need an X-ray now to see that his leg was broken. The jagged edge of the fracture had burst through his skin, shredding through muscle and tendon in the process. Dark, sticky blood pooled around him like a shadow, its warmth entirely out of place amongst what appeared to be the shards of his misplaced bone.

He tore his eyes away from the scene, choking back a gasp, “I-I think I’m going to faint, now,” he whispered to Sapnap.

“Don't! Your brain'll explode or something! Isn't that what happens in a concussion? I don't know!” Sapnap cried, his breaths coming quick, “Just stay awake, okay? I don't want to clean your head juice off of my robes, oh my god, don't die, the matron's on her way, any minute now— George? George! No! If you pass out *I'll* pass out—!”

But before George could even think of poor Sapnap’s consciousness, the world went dark.

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Dream was so focused on putting on a good performance for the Slytherin captain that he didn’t even notice the commotion at first. GB80 had been the one to point it out to him.

“Woah, I think a Ravenclaw kid just rekt himself on the other side of the pitch,” the other Slytherin remarked, pointing at a spot over Dream’s shoulder. When the blond turned around, he saw that a group of people in blue robes were crowded around a spot in the stands. Indeed, it appeared as if one of the quidditch hopefuls had suffered a fall.

“Slytherins! Quit craning yer necks and getting distracted!” Vivian shouted at the Slytherin students. “Accidents happen in this sport! Get on with your passing drills!”

Dream wanted to get right back to the tryout, but a lingering thought kept his eyes trained firmly on the other side of the pitch.

George.

George wasn't the best flyer on the field, but Dream knew he was competent enough to go five minutes without getting into a catastrophic accident. So why, then, was his gut telling him that something was wrong with his best friend?

"Hey, partner, Captain's flying towards us. You should probably toss me the quaffle or something. You know, look sweaty," GB80 called to him, miming a toss as he pulled Dream out of his thoughts.

"Oh, right. Catch!" Dream responded, sending the quaffle sailing through the air and straight into his teammates' hands.

The Slytherin captain nodded approvingly at the pass and jotted something down on a piece of parchment. Dream wondered how much he'd have to practice to be able to balance on his broom *and* take notes at the same time.

After the passing drill, Vivian made them complete an obstacle course. One by one, people were eliminated and told to leave the pitch. Dream and GB80, despite being some of the youngest students trying out, managed to make it all the way to the end of Phase One.

As soon as the teams were let off for their water breaks, Dream had run into the crowd of Ravenclaws, with his roommate trailing behind him. He craned his neck in an attempt to find George, his shoulder's sagging when he realized that his best friend had probably not made it through to the next phase.

"Cold blooded, Dream, leavin' your friend behind." Techno drawled, appearing over his shoulder.

"I mean, it sucks that George didn't make it, but there's nothing I could do about it," the blond sighed, "If we'd been able to partner up I could've covered for him."

GB80 shrugged and clapped Dream on the back. "Psh, George is a noob. He'll get another chance next year. You should be thankful you got to play with a pro like me."

Techno squinted at the Slytherin, "Pro, huh? That remains to be seen..." he took a sip of his water, "Anyways, Professor Aurora told me to tell you that he'll probably be in the Hospital Wing all day, guess you can go 'n see him right after tryouts. Looks like you aren't *too* heartbroken about the whole thing, though, so maybe it'd be better to let him rest."

Dream's breath caught at Techno's words. "I'm sorry, *what* ? The Hospital Wing?"

"That's uh...that's *usually* where kids go when their bones start pokin' outta their skin, yeah."

"*Bones?!* "

"Woah woah, hold on!" GB80 spluttered, blinking his heterochromatic eyes in shock, "I think we're missing a couple of steps here. Mind giving us a rundown about what Noobidson got himself into?"

"Are you guys serious?" Techno quirked an eyebrow at the two incredulous boys. "How often do people fall out of the sky that you just casually missed that whole situation?"

“That was *him* ?!” Dream cried.

“Our captain didn’t let us check! Did you honestly think that an entire group of Slytherins was staying away from drama out of their own free will?!”

“That’s a good point...” Techno muttered. “Well, uh...surprise? I guess?”

“Man, your idea of surprises is *messed up*.” GB80 huffed, “I’m never telling you when my birthday is.”

“May eighteenth,” Techno replied, before throwing his head back and chugging down the rest of his water bottle.

“Wh—!”

“I have to go.” Dream declared.

“Wait, hold on, stop, this man just read my mind or something—!”

“I don’t care. I have to go.”

“You know if you leave the pitch you automatically get disqualified, right?” Techno asked.

“Do you think that *matters* ?! You just told me my best friend’s bones were popping out of his skin like it’s nothing and you think I’m gonna continue quidditch tryouts now?”

“...yeah?”

“No!”

“I’m still on the birthday thing!”

“Take this, put it away for me, I’m going to check on George.” Dream huffed, shoving his broom into GB80’s hand before sprinting off the field and making a mad dash towards the Hospital Wing.

Chapter End Notes

According to AO3 statistics, only a small percentage of readers actually leave kudos. If you enjoyed this chapter, please consider leaving kudos and a comment. It's free, anonymous, and it lets us know you want us to keep writing!

See y'all next update!

Chapter Ten || Year Two

Chapter Summary

George recovers from his injury.

Chapter Notes

Hello again! We're back with another magical update :D poor Gra55 hurt their finger and had to edit this with one hand, so give them some extra love and appreciation please!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream tore down the corridors, pushing past students without so much as a wayward apology in the direction of their disgruntled shouts. He took the stairs to the Hospital Tower two at a time, groaning when one of the staircases began to move beneath his feet. Fortunately, he just *barely* managed to throw himself onto the next floor in time. Unfortunately, the leap caused him to crash directly into Eret, who was knocked over by the force of the impact and sent sprawling to the floor.

"And I *just* left the Hospital Wing!" Eret groaned, rubbing his forehead in pain.

"Wait, you did?!" Dream exclaimed, leaping to his feet and ignoring the throbbing ache on his own skull as he shook Eret by the shoulders. "Is George okay? Is he there?"

"Ow! Yes! He's fine! Madame Abbott's over there fussing over him," Eret cried, pushing the other boy off. "I just went along to tryouts to watch Techno, but then George took a nosedive into the stands and..." he paused and winced at the memory. "It got really bad, so I couldn't stay in there for too long. Sapnap kept saying he felt like he was going to faint so they let *him* stay, but I had to, uh....I had to get out of there."

"Don't worry. I'll make sure he's fine and let you know," Dream assured him, patting his back.

"Thanks..." Eret replied, glancing over Dream's shoulder. "Um, are you sure you need to be in there? It'll probably be better for George if you just...stay away. Maybe give him some space?"

"Are you kidding?! There's no *way* I'm gonna just let George sit there in a hospital bed by himself!"

"He's *not* by himself though!" Eret said, biting his bottom lip nervously. "Madame Abbott and Professor Travers are there, and so's Sapnap. They don't really *need* you there, you know?"

"I don't care! If Sapnap's gonna be there then so should I! I'm George's best friend!"

"Is that *really* why you wanna be there, though?" Eret asked, his tone suddenly turning cold.

Dream raised an eyebrow at him, "Um, duh? Why else?"

A few seconds of silence passed as Eret held his gaze, before shaking his head and looking away.

"Never mind, I have to go." He said hurriedly, clambering to his feet. "Have fun in the Hospital Wing."

Dream hardly had a moment to respond or consider the strange interaction since he was already halfway down the hall.

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Dream was completely out of breath by the time he burst into the Hospital Wing. He instantly doubled over, gasping for air with his hands on his knees.

Looking up through squinting eyes, his gaze immediately found George. The Ravenclaw appeared to be sleeping in one of the many white cots, empty potion vials littering his bedside. His athletic robes were torn and dirtied from his earlier fall, and it looked as if Madame Abbott had cut a portion of the fabric away in order to tend to the wound.

Despite the pounding of his heart in his ears, he could hear Sappnap complaining loudly to the matron about something on the other side of the room.

Dream huffed and righted his position, still focused on the figure of his best friend, when a familiar voice called his name.

"Dream! Come to see Mr. Davidson?" Professor Aurora waved cheerfully at him. The Defense Against the Dark Arts professor was sitting a little ways away from George's bedside and appeared to have been watching the Ravenclaw while he slept.

Dream nodded and took several steps forward until he was at the foot of his friend's bed. The Slytherin couldn't help but shudder at the sight of George's leg. The limb had obviously been reset and was a deep shade of purple, and there was a newly formed scar slightly below the boy's knee where the bone must have poked through the skin.

"Nasty scar, isn't it? Poor thing was in so much pain that Hannah had to administer a Dreamless Sleep Potion," Professor Aurora informed Dream, clearly following his train of thought.

"Is he gonna be alright, though?"

"Oh, he'll be fine, Dream. He drank two vials of Blood-Replenishing Potion when he arrived, and the bone was reset nicely. It's a good thing I was close by when he fell."

Just then, Madame Abbott emerged from behind a curtain, tugging Sappnap along by the arm.

"But I really *do* feel sick, ma'am!" the first-year whined.

"I've had enough of this, Mr. Nappitus. You are disturbing the other patients."

"What other patients? George is the only other patient here, and he's passed out cold!" He gestured towards the sleeping Ravenclaw, "Plus he doesn't care! Right George? *'You're so right Sappnap! And also very handsome!'* See? He's cool with it!"

"That was a spot-on impression," Dream snickered, causing Sappnap to snap his head in the Slytherins direction.

"Dream? You're here? But what about tryouts?! I thought—"

"*Enough* , Mr. Nappitus. Please exit the Hospital Wing," Madame Abbott cut in.

"Why does *he* get to stay, but I don't?!"

"Because Mr. Selwyn is being quiet and respectful, unlike yourself. You first-years are always here crying wolf about your supposed illnesses, wasting my potion supply..."

Dream didn't catch the rest of Madame Abbott's complaint because he suddenly became distracted by movement in the corner of his eye. While the matron was busy chiding Sappap, Professor Aurora had shifted in her seat and pulled out her wand. Dream watched, confused, as the professor hovered the wooden tip over George's injured leg and muttered something under her breath. The sleeping Ravenclaw's bloodstained robes suddenly began to lighten in color as dried brown flakes were lifted from the fabric.

"...and spattergroit can be asymptomatic at first, so I'll probably *die* if you kick me out!"

"Mr. Nappitus, the side effects of spattergroit include an inability to *speak* , which you've *very much* proven to not be the case."

"I just SAID it could be asymptomatic! You *do* know what that means, right?"

"Why, I never....!"

While the argument carried on in the background, Dream watched curiously as the flakes transformed in midair, reverting back to crimson drops. Aurora pulled a small glass vial from her robes and guided the liquid into the vessel with one fluid wand motion, only lowering her wand and popping a cork into place once the vial was completely full.

"You are leaving and that's *final!* "

"But—! But I—!" Sappap stuttered just as the doors to the hospital wing burst open, revealing a disheveled looking Professor Borealis standing in the entrance.

"Those damned ghosts..." she muttered.

Sappap glanced between the Muggle Studies professor and Madame Abbott before letting out a dramatic gasp. His eyes rolled back into his skull theatrically as he collapsed to the floor, smacking his head against a hospital bed on his way down with enough force to knock himself out for real.

"Oh *please* , Mr. Nappitus, lift yourself up this *instant* or I'll be forced to call down the headmistress!"

Sappap remained unresponsive, his tongue lolling out.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," Abbott grumbled. "Bianca, if you wouldn't mind..."

Professor Borealis glanced down at Sappap before her eyes wandered in Aurora's direction, meeting the other woman's gaze. The Defense Against the Dark Arts professor shot her a warm smile in return, causing Borealis to look away hurriedly and refocus on helping Abbott lift Sappap into a hospital bed.

Aurora was still smiling to herself when Dream looked back at her, but dismissed the odd interaction and focused instead on the earlier action he'd witnessed. "What was that all about?" he

asked the professor curiously.

"Weren't you paying attention to the spectacle, Dream? And after your friend went through all that trouble to put on such a great show for us..." she chuckled.

"No, I meant the *other* thing. The thing you did with—"

"Oh," Aurora said, smiling softly. "You mean with Bianca. Well, she and I are a whole other—"

"No! I meant what you did just now with George's blood!"

At this outburst, Aurora's eyes momentarily widened in surprise before her expression relaxed once more. "Oh, you saw that? It's nothing, really," she assured him, waving her hand dismissively. "His robes were filthy, and it's standard to take samples in for testing when a student winds up in the Hospital Wing. I'll just be dropping this off by the Potions classrooms downstairs."

Dream was about to reply when Professor Borealis suddenly appeared over his shoulder.

"Would you like some company, Professor Travers?" the Muggle Studies professor asked cheerfully, smoothing out her robes with her hands.

Professor Aurora glanced around the room before shaking her head. "Oh that won't be necessary, Bianca dear. it's only a quick stop—"

"Please, I insist! I won't allow you to go on your own. The ghosts are being terribly rude today, and I'd hate for them to jeopardize the blood sample with their mischief."

"Ah yes, I can see how well *you* managed to fight them off, Bianca," Aurora teased, looking pointedly at the other professor's disheveled appearance, "but I suppose if you *insist* on joining me, there's nothing I can do to stop you." She sighed, rising from her seat. "Come on, then."

And with that, the two women exited the hospital wing side by side, leaving Dream alone with an unconscious George, a *pretending-to-be-unconscious* Sapnap, and a matron who was too busy fussing over them both to process the recent strange interactions.

"Tell me, do *you* have a spontaneous case of spattergroit as well?" Abbott asked with a sigh.

Dream shook his head in response.

Madame Abbott looked relieved at his answer. "Well, as long as you don't disturb these two too much, I suppose you may stay for a while."

"Thank you," he said, settling into a chair by George's beside as the matron nodded and turned to go to the back of the infirmary.

Once the matron had finally disappeared behind the curtain, Dream smiled and turned to Sapnap's supposedly unconscious body. "She's gone," he whispered to the first-year.

Sapnap immediately huffed and sat up in his bed. "Thank god, my tongue was getting dry."

"Are you actually okay? You hit your head pretty hard with that fall."

"Psh, that's nothing, especially not compared to *this* guy," the Gryffindor said, gesturing to George.

"Must've been pretty bad."

"It was worse than pretty bad. You should've seen his leg *before* Abbott took care of it," Sapnap said, cringing at the memory. "Or uh, maybe it's better that you didn't. It was kinda disgusting."

Dream nodded, looking at the marred appearance of his friend's leg. He knew the scars weren't permanent, non-magical wounds never were, but that didn't stop him from grimacing at the thought of what his friend had experienced.

Sapnap crossed and uncrossed his legs absentmindedly, seemingly thinking about something. "So," he finally said, "Borealis and Aurora were here before, right?"

"Yeah," Dream answered. "Hey, why do you think Borealis even came here in the first place?"

Sapnap's eyes twinkled. "Oh ho, you have no idea, do you?"

"No idea about what?"

"This is great!" Sapnap clapped his hands together, "Okay, so I have this theory I came up with about Borealis and Aurora after spying on them a little—"

"You were *spying* on them?"

"Oh c'mon, not like *that*, it's just whenever they were together in public I happened to notice a few things."

"...Sapnap."

"No, I'm serious! Like, I almost always see them in the Great Hall and sometimes in between classes. It's not like you have to go out of your way to run into teachers around here," Sapnap added with a roll of his eyes.

"Right..."

"Ugh, forget the whole spying thing and just answer this question: did you see how they left the Hospital Wing?"

"Um, together?"

"Together!" Sapnap cheered.

"Mr. Nappitus!" The matron cried, sliding the curtain open, "You are in a *heap* of trouble, young man!"

"Shoot, I've been found out, gotta blast!" Sapnap declared, scrambling out of the hospital bed and throwing his sheets to the side, "I'll explain everything later!"

With that, he dashed through the door and slammed it shut behind him before Abbott had the chance to add anything else.

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George had never woken up from a devastating injury feeling so comfortable.

Sure, his head was a bit fuzzy and his leg basically felt like a log, but he'd take feeling like a log over excruciating pain any day.

He blinked his eyes and sat up, stretching his arms over his head. The healing potions that Madame Abbott had given him had worked like...well, like *magic* .

He'd known that wizards could heal minor injuries with spells practically instantly, but he hadn't really been able to appreciate how effective magical healing was up until that moment. The potions didn't just heal his broken leg — all of his minor bumps and injuries, ranging from the bruise he'd acquired when he tripped down the common room stairs a few days prior, to the cold sore on the inside of his cheek, had seemingly vanished. If it weren't for the numbingly heavy weight of his leg, he'd feel well enough to stand up and stroll right out of the infirmary.

He remembered how utterly mangled his leg had been the night before. With how foreign the limb felt, he'd be surprised if it was even still attached to his body.

Wait....Am I a magical amputee, now!? his mind questioned, panicked.

Suddenly filled with dread, George reached over and tore the sheet from his body in one swift motion. To his relief, his leg was still attached *and* wasn't bent the wrong way anymore. The second-year sighed and leaned back against the headboard.

A familiar voice disrupted him from his thoughts.

"So, you're awake now, are ya?"

Startled, George whipped his head in the direction of the sound, causing his cot to creak at the sudden movement. His head still felt a little fuzzy, so it took a few moments for him to register who the voice belonged to.

"Whoa, there," Philza chuckled. "I wouldn't move *too* fast if I were you. Ya had to stay here overnight, after all."

Now that his eyes were more focused, George could see that the sixth-year had a textbook open on his lap. "Phil?" George asked, surprise coloring his tone. "What are you doing here?"

Philza smiled softly and leaned forward in his seat to ruffle the younger boy's hair. "Come on now, George, I couldn't *not* come check on you after Eloise told me what happened. It's a big deal when one of our students has to stay in the Hospital Wing overnight."

George groaned at the mention of the quidditch captain, burying his head in his hands to hide his reddening cheeks. "How long have I been out?" he asked from in between his fingers.

"I just said overnight, didn't I?" Philza asked, amused. "Oh, dear. Do we have to check your head again?"

"No, I mean...well yeah, I guess you *did* say overnight, but what time is it now?"

Phil glanced up at a clock somewhere above George's head before answering. "It's a bit past one in the afternoon on a Sunday. Ya know, ya got a lotta visitors over your stay."

"Did I?"

"Oh, yeah. All sorta people came and went, but *that* one didn't leave once." Phil nodded towards the other side of the room where George saw Dream snoring away in a plastic chair, head lolling

back and mouth hanging open.

"That *can't* be good for his neck..." George mumbled.

Phil snorted. " *You* try tellin him that. I spoke to one of his roommates earlier when he stopped by to bring him breakfast. Turns out your friend's a kicker *and* a biter. Awful combo, but it proved highly effective in lettin him stay here." The prefect shrugged, dog-earing the page he was on and slamming his textbook shut. "I'll go get Abbott for ya. She'll want to check you up now that you're awake." With that, the older boy slid the book onto George's bedside and went off in search of the matron.

George spent a few more moments appraising Dream. He knew he should probably rouse the other boy to let him know that he was alright, but the blond just looked so...peaceful. The Slytherin's hair was sticking up on one side from where he'd clearly been leaning his head against the wall as he slept, and the sight made George smile to himself.

Instead of waking his friend, the Ravenclaw turned his attention to the textbook Phil had left on his bedside table. Curious about what subjects the older boy would be taking at the N.E.W.T. level, George reached out and brought the book closer to his face so that he could read the title.

His body froze. He felt his heart leap into his throat as it began beating faster in his chest. His hand shook as it hovered over the words printed on the front cover.

Fæv fækmw Rnþm TRFþHfþTIFþ: Advanced Anglo-Saxon Rune Translation.

Phil was studying Ancient Runes. Though George's memory was admittedly a bit blurred, he *did* remember Dream mentioning something about Selwyn Sr. corresponding with some colleagues in Runic. Of course, there were so many different Runic scripts in existence that the one Dream's dad had been using might not even be *mentioned* in a sixth-year textbook. Plus, there was the fact that the original source material had been confiscated.

But perhaps...

“Dream!” George hissed at his sleeping friend. When the blond didn’t wake immediately, the Ravenclaw reached behind his back and tossed a pillow at the other boy’s head.

Dream leapt out of his chair immediately and tumbled to the floor. “What?! Who’s there?!” the boy exclaimed, looking around frantically for an attacker.

George rolled his eyes and shushed the Slytherin, causing his friend's head to turn in his direction. The blond gasped and immediately rushed to the shorter boy's bedside upon registering that he was awake.

“George! You’re up!”

“Yes I am, you idiot, but I want you to—”

“I was so worried, Gogi!”

A part of George warmed at his friend's concern. However, a larger part of George knew they didn't have much time before Philza returned with Madame Abbott.

“Dream,” George said, giving the other boy a serious look. “Look at this textbook. Does the writing on the cover look familiar to you?”

Dream looked a bit puzzled at George's tone, but he obediently glanced down at the book in the Ravenclaw's hands.

"Why do you want me to look at some textbook?" Dream asked, rubbing the sleep from his eyes so he could get a clearer look at the cover.

"*Runes*, Dream. Look at the runes. Do they look familiar?"

It took the taller boy several moments, but eventually Dream gasped and his eyes widened in recognition.

"Yes! Those are the ones Dad used!"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. I remember some of these sticks and squiggles."

George smiled triumphantly at their good fortune. "We should put Philza's textbook back on the table then, we'll talk about this later today once I get out of the Hospital Wing. There are probably several volumes in the library that we can—"

The sound of approaching footsteps interrupted George's sentence, and the two boys were immediately reminded that their conversation would not be private for much longer.

Dream nodded once, seemingly making up his mind about something. "Meet me in the library in an hour," he whispered hurriedly to George before slipping the textbook under his robes and making a mad dash towards the door.

"Dream, you can't just *take* Philza's book! He needs it!" George called out after his friend.

"It's an emergency! Cover for me!"

"No, you *idiot*—"

George was cut off with a slam of the Hospital Wing door just as Philza and Madame Abbott turned the corner. The Ravenclaw prefect shot George a questioning glance.

"Where'd Selwyn run off to?" he asked, perplexed.

"Um...he had some...last minute assignment? That he just remembered?"

Phil raised an eyebrow. "...Really?"

George averted his eyes and shrugged while Madame Abbott bent down to inspect his leg. The matron prodded the limb a bit and instructed George to bend his knee and flex his foot. When the second-year proved capable of performing these basic movements, Madame Abbott gave a satisfied hum and told him to try walking.

George hesitated at first, but soon stood up and took a few tentative steps forward. To his amazement, he felt no pain. The potions had accomplished overnight what would have taken Muggle doctors months.

"How does it feel, Mr. Davidson?"

George smiled at the question and jumped up and down experimentally. "It feels incredible, Madame Abbott. Thank you so much," he thanked the matron earnestly.

“Oh, now, no need to thank me. I was only doing my job, dear.”

“S-still. I can’t believe you healed me so quickly,” George stuttered. Madame Abbott seemed to find the response endearing.

“Don’t let me see you in here again, you hear?” she told him sternly as she collected the linens from his cot. George nodded.

“I promise I’ll try to stay out of trouble.”

“Speaking of trouble, George, where’s my Runes textbook?”

Philza had his arms crossed and was staring pointedly at the bedside table his book had been on only minutes earlier. George swallowed nervously and racked his brain for a plausible explanation. He briefly considered making a run for it, but figured his leg wouldn’t be able to handle the escape, no matter how good Abbott’s potions were.

“Your silence is telling, Georgie. Was it Selwyn?”

“Um...maybe?”

Philza sighed and ran a hand through his blond hair. “And *why* exactly did he kidnap my Ancient Runes textbook?”

“W-well it’s like I said, he uh... wanted to study, right?”

“I don’t *know* , that’s why I asked you. Can ya respond my questions with a real answer now?”

“I— no.”

The prefect rolled his eyes and gave George a withering look. “Listen, I don’t care what kind of shenanigans you two are tryin to pull here, but couldya *at least* get it to me by supper?”

“O-of course! I’ll ask him right now,” George promised. On that note, the second-year bade an awkward farewell to Madame Abbott and speed-limped out the door.

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Freshly showered and dressed, George wasted no time in heading to the library directly from Ravenclaw Tower. When the boy arrived, Dream was already sitting at one of the tables along the back wall, poring over the stolen Runes textbook and scribbling notes on a piece of parchment.

“You’re using a pen.” George remarked, plopping himself into the seat across from his friend. Dream was so focused on his task that he didn’t even look up from his notes.

“Mmhmm. Took one of Techno’s.”

When Dream said nothing further about what he was doing, George leaned over the table to catch a glimpse of the other boy’s parchment.

“Geo- *orge* , stop it,” Dream whined, swatting the Ravenclaw away.

“Can I see?”

“Gimme a minute.”

Another minute passed in silence while Dream’s eyes scanned the pages of the textbook, his eyebrows furrowed in concentration. Idly, George noticed that Dream had a habit of biting his bottom lip while he worked.

Eventually, the Slytherin put down his stolen pen and shook his head a few times, as if to clear it. “I can’t remember all of the runes, but they were definitely Anglo-Saxon,” he said at last.

“That’s a good start,” George said with a nod.

“One thing I *do* remember,” Dream continued, “is the letter ‘k.’ It was the first letter of the heading at the top of the list.”

“Like, the first rune?”

Dream shook his head. “No, the first *letter*. I thought it was weird that all of the letters were in Runic except for the first one, but look at what it says here.” Dream slid the open textbook across the table for George to read.

*The Futhork Alphabet consisted of thirty-three runes used by Saxon wizards in the fourth through seventh centuries. These thirty-three runes along with their modern transcriptions can be found on page 184 at the back of this book. It should be noted that the sixth rune in the Futhork Alphabet, k (ken), fell out of use during the sixth century when wizards began to use the Latin k in order to avoid persecution by Christian Muggles. See Chapter Fourteen for further historical notes.*

“So...they stopped using the Runic letter ‘k?’” George asked once he finished reading.

Dream nodded and flipped to another page in the book. “You don’t have to read it all ‘cuz it’s super boring, but basically the Saxon Muggles started associating that specific rune with ‘evil spirits’ and decided to start burning anyone who continued to write with it. So the wizards just started using the Latin letter instead.”

“So then it makes sense that your father’s note had the letter ‘k’ in it. They were just using a later version of the Futhork Alphabet!”

“Exactly,” Dream stated.

“That’s awesome, Dream, but it’s only one single letter. How on earth are we going to decode the rest of the note when we don’t even *have* the original source anymore?”

In lieu of a response, the blond boy slid his piece of parchment across the table. George squinted at the notes, trying to make sense of the symbols he saw scrawled hastily in smudged blue ink.

k†\_\_† PIRH†-\_\_\_\_\_h

“What’s this?” the Ravenclaw asked, confused.

“So basically,” Dream started to explain, pointing the tip of his wand at the characters he’d written on the paper, “I remembered that the second letter was a weird sideways ‘x.’ When I checked the textbook, I realized that it’s actually a Runic ‘n.’”

“Okay…”

“And the other thing I remembered was *this*,” Dream continued, shifting his wand so that it was directly underneath five particular symbols. “What does that look like it says to you, George?”

George squinted and considered the symbols before him once more.

*FIRST*

“Um, I don’t know much Runic, Dream.”

Dream rolled his eyes and sighed exasperatedly. “For a Ravenclaw, you really can be pretty dumb. You don’t need Runic, you dimwit. What English letters do they look like?”

After a few seconds, it clicked. “Oh!” George gasped. “F-I-R-S-T. First?”

Dream had an excited glint in his eye now. “*Yes*. I remembered thinking that the symbols looked kinda like the word ‘first,’ so I checked the textbook—”

“—and those are the actual Runic characters!” George finished.

“Precisely. And what did the names on that list all have in common?”

George’s eyes widened as he made the connection moments later. “We’re all second-years, which means that we were all first-years last year.”

“Yep! So if those five letters say *F-I-R-S-T*, then—”

“—the four letters *after* the hyphen probably spell out *Y-E-A-R* !”

George picked up the pen and hurriedly found a blank space on the parchment. There, underneath Dream’s Runic, he wrote some additional notes.

*KN--N FIRST-YEAR -----S*

“Ugh, I feel like we’re *so* close to figuring this out,” Dream mumbled, his gaze fixed on the piece of parchment.

“We are, I think. I reckon we just need to think about what that nine-letter word ending with an ‘s’ could be.”

The two boys sat in silence, thinking.

“Hey, Dream,” George said after a few minutes, “do you remember all of the names on that list?”

“Um...” the other boy said, tapping his chin with the tip of his wand in thought. “There were six, I think. You, Karl, Techno, a girl from Gryffindor...”

“Wait, wait, let me write these down.” George flipped the parchment over and began to scribble down the names. “Which girl from Gryffindor?”

“Ackerman, I think. Her name’s Abigail or something? I don’t talk to Gryffindor, much.”

“Oh and what am I? Chopped dragon liver?” George heard someone sniff over his shoulder.

The two second-years shared an exasperated knowing look as Sapnap pulled up a chair and made himself comfortable at their library table. Without even asking, the Gryffindor boy picked up the textbook and flipped through a few of the pages.

“Ancient Runes? You guys can’t even take this class until next year,” he remarked as his eyes scanned a few of the diagrams. “What are we studying these for?”

“We,” Dream snapped, nodding between George and himself as he snatched the textbook back from the first-year, “were kind of in the middle of something.”

Sapnap shrugged and leaned back in his chair. “Don’t let me stop you, then.”

Dream looked like he was about to say something else, but George silenced him with a look that said *it’s not worth it*.

“Just keep going, Dream. Who else?” the Ravenclaw pressed.

“Karl’s roommate was on there...the Baratashvili kid. Oh, and a Ravenclaw girl. Zakarian.”

Once George finished writing down all of the names, the three boys looked at the list with pensive expressions on their faces.

“Oh, this is about those attacks that happened before I came to Hogwarts, right?”

“*Shhh*, Sapnap, we’re thinking,” George muttered.

“Well...whoever did the attacks is a big coward,” Sapnap said, ignoring the irritated look George shot him. “Who goes after defenseless first-years?”

“Someone weak,” Dream said. “Someone who isn’t a capable enough wizard to target older students.”

“Wait...are you suggesting this was a student?” George asked.

“I mean...you’d think that an adult wouldn’t *need* to only go after first-years.”

Something else dawned on George, then. “Wait...Techno’s attack happened on the night of your duel.”

“Yeah.”

“So who would have known that the duel was taking place that night?”

Sapnap’s eyes widened and he nearly jumped out of his seat. “*Oh* man! You’re saying one of your

buddies is the attacker?"

George nodded and scribbled some more notes down on the scrap of parchment. "Think about it. Who did we tell about the duel?"

"Everyone who was at the table when I challenged him," Dream replied. "So...me, you, Wilbur, Eret..."

"Did you tell anyone else? Your roommates, maybe?"

"Bad helped me train for it, so he knew. And, yeah, I mentioned it to Schlatt and GB80 so they could cover for me if any of the prefects performed a room check."

"You guys, these names might not *mean* anything. You do know that the people on the list could have spread the word, right? Slytherins gossip like old ladies," Sappnap reminded the older boys.

"That's true..." George muttered, mentally trying to put together the puzzle pieces. *But it's still a lead*, he decided, filing the list of suspects for later. "Well, what else do the people on this hit list have in common, other than all being in the same year?"

"Uh...well, none of them are Slytherins," Sappnap pointed out.

"C'mon, Sap, an attacker wouldn't care about something as dumb as a Hogwarts House."

"Hey, I only said it 'cause George asked!"

"It's something more sinister than that," Dream asserted. His expression darkened, then, and he looked at George seriously. "George, I think you know what I mean."

George *did* know. The troubled history of blood status in the magical world was not something anyone could forget; after all, prejudice against Muggle-borns was the main reason for two major wizarding wars. So, with a grimace, the Ravenclaw nodded and put the pen to parchment once more.

"I'm Muggle-born," he said, making a note next to his name. "So is Karl."

"And Techno," Dream added.

"Techno isn't—"

"His only magical parent was, so he *basically* is, George."

George pursed his lips and scribbled a similar note next to Techno's name. "What about Abigail Ackerman? I know next to nothing about the Gryffindors in our year."

"She isn't Muggle-born," Sappnap informed them, "but both of her parents are. My dad is friends with them."

"See? Another one," Dream said.

"She grew up with magic, though. How could *anyone* call her Muggle-born?"

"It's not about the magic, George."

"Then what *is* it about, Dream?"

“Just note it down. Trust me.”

Frustrated as he was by his friend’s line of reasoning, George made another note beside the name *Ackerman* and turned his attention to the two remaining names on the list.

“Zakarian’s Muggle-born. I know that for sure,” George said.

“And Baratashvili’s also Muggle-born. I talk to him sometimes when I eat at the Hufflepuff table,” Dream stated.

“So...it’s clear that everyone on the list is of Muggle descent,” George acknowledged. “But even if the attacks *were* a racist thing, that doesn’t tell us what the nine-letter word ending with ‘s’ is.”

“Try ‘Muggle-borns,’” Sappnap suggested.

George wrote the word down and quickly shook his head. “That’s eleven letters.”

“Well, maybe they used the American term. Try ‘No-Maj-borns.’”

“That’s one letter too many, Sappnap. Guys, maybe this isn’t a racist thing after all,” George added hurriedly, not wanting to face the implications of what Dream had suggested. “The missing word could be a word like ‘beginners,’ or maybe even something like—”

“Oh, gimme the pen, Gogi,” Dream cut in, snatching the pen from his friend’s hand and writing something else down.

“What are you—”

The words quickly died in George’s throat once he registered what Dream had written.

There, in Dream’s barely legible chicken scratch, was the ugliest nine-letter word George had ever seen.

*MUDBLOODS.*

## Chapter End Notes

I'm going to be trying to use Tumblr more, so say hi to me there if you want!  
[kangarookan.tumblr.com](http://kangarookan.tumblr.com)

According to AO3 statistics, only a small percentage of readers actually leave kudos. If you enjoyed this update, please consider leaving kudos and a comment. It's free, anonymous, and it lets us know you want us to keep writing!

See you guys next time! Much love!

## Chapter Eleven || Year Two

### Chapter Summary

George, Dream, and Sapnap try to narrow down the suspects.

### Chapter Notes

This chapter, we coded is so that Gra55 is insane and writes 8K+ words in a day. This took forever to edit because it is a THICC chapter. Go give Gra55 a lot of love in the comments because they helped me take this story from a little itty bitty idea to something epic. With that being said...enjoy the update!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

All three members of the trio were visibly tense come dinner.

The first thing George did was return Philza's textbook. The prefect had good-naturedly accepted both the book and a muttered apology before waving the second-year off. Upon returning to the Ravenclaw table, George sandwiched himself between Sapnap and Dream, the former of whom was shooting suspicious glances at every other second-year in the vicinity.

Once George had finished piling his plate full of pasta, Wilbur brought him into the conversation with a question.

"George, mate, you're back! How's the leg doing?" Wilbur asked.

"It's fine," George murmured, shrugging. It was rather difficult to make small talk when all he could think about were runes and racial slurs.

Wilbur tilted his head and shot him a concerned look. "Well, that doesn't *sound* fine, Gogi. What's the matter? Is Abbott slacking?"

"N-no!" George stuttered. "She did a great job! Sorry, I'm just—"

"—still high off of the potion effects," Sapnap cut in, shooting George an embarrassing attempt at an inconspicuous wink, " *Right*, George?"

Dream sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose in exasperation at the first-year's utter lack of subtlety.

"Erm, yeah, that's it..." George replied.

"That makes sense," Wilbur nodded, spearing a piece of steak with his fork. "We've been so worried about you, you know? We wanted to keep you company, so we tried to arrange a sleepover in the Hospital Wing last night. Can you believe Abbott kicked us out?"

"*After* we dragged all our bed sheets across the entire castle!" Eret cried. "Wilbur and I had to carry

all the linens and pillows back up to Ravenclaw Tower *without help*," he added, glaring pointedly at Techno.

"What're you lookin' at me for? I have an injury," he responded, not bothering to look up from his plate.

"*What injury?! Nothing even touched you during the tryouts!*"

"First of all, not true. That one bludger Dream's roommate buddy smacked in my direction almost made my broom explode—"

"It only brushed the back of it." Wilbur snorted.

"Wilbur, I was the one on the broom. I think I'd know. It was makin' those 'I'm about to explode' noises, okay? I'm a professional, don't question me."

"I wouldn't dream of it."

"Good. *Second* of all, I can't believe you would just forget about my trauma like that, Eret. Here I was thinkin' we were friends. Friends don't forget each other's traumatic experiences, okay? *Especially* if they were involved in 'em."

Eret stared back at the other Ravenclaw with wide eyes. "I— I genuinely have no idea what you're talking about—"

"The *stab wound*, Eret. From when someone *stabbed* me with a *knife*. You know, the night you were stunned when you were tryin' to follow me down the stairs?"

"Wh— that was a YEAR AGO!" Eret cried.

"Not yet, technically. And that doesn't mean it doesn't hurt anymore." Techno rolled his eyes.

"Are you seriously going to sit here and tell me that a stab wound you got one year ago—"

"It hasn't been a year yet—"

"*One year ago*, that was healed with *magical potions*, was *sooo* painful that you couldn't help me and Wilbur carry the sheets back to our dorm room last night?"

"....yeah."

"No!"

Techno shrugged and took a sip of pumpkin juice. "Sometimes old injuries flare up. That's just how they work."

"Only injuries left with *dark magic*. Not ordinary stab wounds that have been healed with potions," Wilbur cut in, elbowing the other boy in the ribs. "That's one of the first things we learned, Techno! What happened to the genius who scored the highest marks in DADA last year?"

Techno scrunched his eyebrows together, seeming to mull over the information, "I, uh... we *did* learn that, didn't we?"

"Pfft, yeah, we did. Can't use the stab wound excuse anymore, mate."

"I guess not..." he trailed off, seemingly thinking. "It really *does* flare up sometimes, though," he



added, rubbing the site of his old injury.

"*Sure* it does," Wilbur rolled his eyes and patted his roommate on the back. "I can't believe I had the *audacity* to ask you for help carrying blankets when your booboos from last year still causes you such excruciating pain."

Techno grumbled something under his breath that George couldn't quite hear and shoved a forkful of mashed potatoes into his mouth. Before George could contribute anything else to his roommate's conversation, however, Sapnap elbowed him in the ribs.

"*Ow*, what's wrong with you?" the Ravenclaw hissed, wincing.

Instead of apologizing, Sapnap merely pointed towards the High Table at the back of the Great Hall.

"Look over there," the first-year whispered.

George followed the younger boy's line of sight until his gaze rested on two of their professors eating dinner. Failing to see anything out of the ordinary, the Ravenclaw raised an eyebrow at his friend.

"What am I looking at, exactly?"

On George's other side, Dream facepalmed.

"Ugh, don't listen to him, Gogi. Sapnap has this stupid theory about—"

"It's *totally* true and you know it, Dream. Just *look* at them," the Gryffindor insisted.

George was still a bit lost. "Can one of you just tell me what we're looking at?"

"Aurora and Borealis," Dream supplied with an eye roll.

"They've *totally* got the hots for each other. It's so obvious. Look at the way Aurora is twirling her hair."

"She's tying it up, you dimwit. That's what people with long hair do."

George squinted and focused on the professors once more. The two women looked to be pleasantly chatting over dinner. George watched as Professor Travers laughed at something Professor Borealis said before taking a sip from her goblet. Not seeing anything out of the ordinary, the Ravenclaw turned back to his friends' squabble.

"—and she's doing it so *flirtatiously*!"

"What does a 'flirtatious' ponytail even look like, Sapnap?"

"Like *that*! Right, George? Tell me you see it."

George shook his head, prompting Sapnap to groan.

"You two are *blind*. I mean, not seeing colors is one thing, but not seeing love when it's right in front of you?"

George and Dream shared an exasperated look at their friend's rant and resumed eating.

“Hey, Techno!” a voice called out from George’s left. Turning his head, his eyes landed on a familiar pair of red and yellow eyes.

“Gémure-Boye,” Techno acknowledged with the tiniest nod.

“Didn’t get the chance to congratulate you on making Chaser! The whole team pulled me away there at the end because, you know, I was *kinda* the mvp.” The Slytherin remarked, tossing his black and white fringe, “That final game got preeeeetty intense, huh?”

“For you, maybe.”

“Oh, no, not for me, I was doing great! Hardly broke a sweat. I did notice *you* shaking in your boots at my bludgers though.” He smirked, “C’mon, aren’t you gonna be a good sport and congratulate me back?”

Techno raised an eyebrow and gave the boy an appraising look, “....Sorry, who are you again?”

“Wow. And to think I targeted you.” GB80 tsked, folding his arms across his chest as he tried to mask a small smile with the shake of his head.

For the first time since his injury, it occurred to George to ask about the results of the tryouts. He turned to look at his best friend, who was pushing the food around on his plate absently.

“Dream?”

“Yeah?”

“How did the rest of tryouts go?” George asked in a quiet voice. Dream shrugged.

“I don’t know. I didn’t stay for Phase Two.”

“Oh,” George said, touching the other boy on the arm comfortingly. “That’s alright. Lots of other people were eliminated in the first round too.”

When Dream looked down at George’s hand on his arm quizzically, the Ravenclaw paused and went over their conversation in his head. *He didn’t stay for Phase Two, so he must’ve been eliminated after my accident, right?*

Seeing the confusion in his friend’s eyes, Dream shook his head and began to explain. “I wasn’t eliminated, George. I was disqualified.”

“Disqualified?” George puzzled, “For *what* ? Did you cheat or something?”

Dream pulled back his arm away at that, looking affronted. “Cheat? Gosh, no. Why does everyone always think Slytherins are cheaters?”

Sapnap snorted, then, and Dream sent the younger boy a glare.

“Got something to say, Sappy?”

“Nope, nope, don’t mind me. Carry on,” the Gryffindor got out, nearly choking on his food. “Can’t imagine why anyone would think Slytherins cheat.”

“Anyways,” Dream huffed, returning his attention to George. “Anyone who leaves the pitch mid-tryouts is automatically disqualified. So...yeah.”

“But why would you— *oh* !” George cut off as it dawned on him what Dream had done. “You mean...you left tryouts because of me? Because I...fell?”

“Duh.” The Slytherin rolled his eyes, snorting, “I couldn’t just *not* check on you.”

“B-but...Dream, you *idiot* ! You could have made the team!”

“There’s always next year.” He shrugged, “And besides, you’re more important than the team, anyways.”

“Woah woah woah, let’s calm down here, okay?” GB80 cut in, having overheard their conversation. “He’s just a human being with, like, a life and a purpose or whatever. That’s *nothing* compared to whacking balls very hard at people.”

“Or flyin’ fast on brooms,” Techno added.

“*Exactly*.” The Slytherin nodded, “Gosh, imagine thinking people are worth more than quidditch.”

George sighed and rolled his eyes at the two, “Wow, you guys are so right, I could never. Dream’s just an idiot who values human life, next time remember that I’m worthless and sports are more important, okay?”

“What *ever*,” Dream muttered as the two quidditch players snickered at George’s response.

“It’s like I always say, perfect dives over human lives.” Techno said solemnly.

Wilbur’s fork clattered onto his plate as he choked on his food and Eret rushed to slap him on the back.

“Oh my gosh, that was perfect!” GB80 cried, “Wait— wait! I have a good one,” he coughed out, wiping the tears out of his eyes, “Faster broom to escape the tomb!”

“Learn to fly before you die.”

The two cackled at their stupid rhymes, trying to one up each others phrases and only succeeding in making themselves laugh harder.

Wilbur cast a concerned glance between the quidditch players, shooting a questioning look at Eret, who simply shrugged.

George put on a small smile at their antics, taking another sip of his drink, hoping to mask the lingering guilt he felt over Dream’s revelation.

He *knew* that his miserable experience trying out for quidditch was a complete accident. He knew that he would have left the pitch in a heartbeat had Dream gotten so severely injured, no matter *how* much more important quidditch was than his friend being alive. Yet there was still a nagging voice in his head saying that Dream’s disqualification was all George’s fault.

“Hey,” Dream said softly, nudging his friend and snapping him out of his thoughts. “You’re not worthless, you know.”

When George met his best friend’s eyes, they were open and earnest. He felt his face warm at the intensity of the other boy’s gaze.

“I know,” he replied, voice barely above a whisper.

Dream beamed and leaned in to mess up George's hair, much to the shorter boy's annoyance. "Good," the Slytherin said loudly once George's hair was utterly tousled. "We love you, George!"

Several other people at their table made similar declarations, except for the quidditch players who shouted something along the lines of "Being in action over human interaction!"

George buried his face in his hands, trying to hide his blush from the sudden attention. He couldn't be more grateful when the time finally came to retreat to the peace and quiet of his common room.

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The second-years fell back into comfortable routines once the excitement of quidditch tryouts had passed. Or, at least, the *other* second-years did.

For Dream and George, the weeks that followed were anything *but* normal. The same went for Sapnap, who rarely left the second-years' sides.

The three boys began spending more and more time in the Hogwarts Library, their table always piled suspiciously high with random books to hide a gut-wrenching list of suspects. In spite of the evidence the trio had gathered, George struggled to accept the idea that *any* of his friends could be pureblood supremacists, let alone that they could be *violent* ones. The concept was impossible to wrap his head around. But every time he started to think that just *maybe* there was a different explanation for the hit list, the facts of the matter stared him in the face.

It *had* to be one of their friends.

Dream had taken it upon himself to interrogate Schlatt immediately after they had translated the runes. From what the blond told George afterwards, Schlatt had sworn he'd kept Dream and Techno's ill-fated duel a secret, and had also insisted that GB80 didn't tell anyone, either. When Dream wouldn't stop asking if the other boy was *absolutely sure* no one else knew about the duel, Schlatt threatened to send an expository howler on the matter to every single person in the castle. Dream left him alone after that.

So that is how the three of them wound up spending another fall weekend sitting around a library table, staring at their list of suspects with feelings of dread and no clue how on earth they were going to weed out the traitor.

"Maybe your roommate was lying?" Sapnap hypothesized, glancing at his friends' consternated expressions.

"Why would he, though?" Dream questioned, sighing. "Don't get me wrong, I *wish* he could be lying. If he was, we could blame someone else for all this stuff. But Schlatt isn't exactly... the lying type."

Sapnap scoffed at the statement. "Not the—! Dream, this is the same kid who tried to *poison* me and Ponk with jelly beans on the Hogwarts Express at the beginning of the year! Schlatt is *exactly* the type of person to lie."

Dream shook his head. "No. He ca—he *doesn't* lie. He just doesn't. Yeah, he's the type to twist his words and work with technicalities, but he doesn't *do* lying."

"But the *beans*, Dream! The beans!" Sapnap insisted.

"Even with the whole bean thing he didn't *lie* ! He said he had a sixth sense, which was true. He said that no bean would hurt *George*, which was also true. Then he spouted some B.S. about feeling like he was 'close to you' or something, which was *technically* true 'cuz the compartment was fairly small, so...."

Sapnap huffed, unimpressed. "Okay, so he's a manipulator, not a liar. Cool. But just 'cause he didn't lie on the train doesn't mean he isn't lying *now*."

"Sapnap, he said, and I quote, 'I never told anybody about it.' There's no way to work around that, is there?" Dream demanded.

"....I guess not."

"Exactly."

"So..." Sapnap trailed off, looking dejected. "That means it really *is* one of our buddies, huh."

"It's gotta be."

"Well, maybe one of the Raven-nerds told other people!"

"First of all, it's *Ravenclaws*," George corrected with an eye roll. "Second, Wilbur and Eret *really* didn't want to get Techno and Dream in trouble for the duel, remember? I know you weren't here last year, Sapnap, but McGonagall questioned them after Techno was attacked, and they didn't say a word about the duel to her."

"Besides," Dream added, "We can't start interrogating every single person on our suspect list. They'll be on to us."

"Wilbur and Eret lying to McGonagall feels...kinda irresponsible, but I guess they're sorta in the clear for that one..." Sapnap trailed off, looking hesitant. "I—I hate to ask this, but what about....you know."

"What?"

"Don't make me say it, Dream," Sapnap whined. "He's like, the nicest guy to ever exist, but—"

"It's *not* Bad." Dream snapped, voice cold. "In fact," the Slytherin clicked his pen and pointedly scribbled all over the third-year's name until it was unrecognizable. "There. He's not even on the list."

"That's just not fair."

"Are you *seriously* suggesting we keep him on the list, Sapnap?!"

"Dream," George cut in, "I know this sounds, well, 'bad,' but...he's the only one on our list that would be strong enough to easily subdue a first-year. Plus, he *did* know Karl's schedule..."

"I can't *believe* what I'm hearing from you guys right now. *Bad* ? The Hufflepuff? The one who flinches every time an older student cusses? The one who is literally *terrified* that Skeppy's pranks are gonna end up killing him?! You think *he's* the bigoted hate-crimer?!"

"Okay, riddle me *this* Dream!" Sapnap challenged, standing up, "What kind of ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD is a bigoted hate-crimer?!" He banged his fists on the table, shaking the stacks of books

around them.

Dream offered no response, his eyes remaining downcast.

"Look at me! Huh?! *Tell me* ! Nothing about this situation makes sense, okay?! We're just *kids* ! We're kids trying to figure out which one of our other kid friends is a racist, lying, *traitor* who attacks and maims people off of a HIT LIST!"

A wave of angry, silencing *shhhh* s echoed back at them in response. George shot the other library occupants an apologetic look as he pulled Sapnap back down by his robes and forced the first-year back into his seat.

"*Keep it down*," he hissed at him.

"This is so, *so* unfair," Sapnap whispered, his voice cracking, "We— we shouldn't have to be doing something like this...."

George sighed sympathetically, wrapping an arm around Sapnap's shoulder. The first-year leaned into the touch gratefully, trembling slightly as he did so.

It really isn't fair, George realized, looking down at the younger boy, *especially to Sapnap*. The Gryffindor had nothing to do with this whole situation and yet he'd thrown himself headfirst into the investigation. Sapnap didn't care about how dangerous their investigation was; he cared about fighting for his friends and standing up for what he believed was right. He truly *was* brave.

Dream's shoulders sagged as he stared silently at the list, as though he could intimidate it into revealing the name of the traitor. After several moments, the Slytherin swallowed audibly and shakily wrote Bad's name down on the parchment once more.

"This is so messed up," he whispered, voice wavering.

"This is the *most* messed up thing *ever*," Sapnap agreed, wiping his face with a nod as he leaned out of George's hug. "But what do we do from here?"

"I guess we just have to...follow people around?" George suggested with a shrug.

"You want us to stalk our friends until we figure out which one of them is a racist traitor?"

"Stop phrasing it like that, Dream, I don't like it either!" George cried, clenching his fists. "This whole thing is wrong to the trillionth degree, but do you have any better ideas!?"

Dream sighed, clicking the pen in exasperation, "I...no."

"That's it, then. We're just going to have to... *stalk* our friends. If we see anyone do something suspicious, we move their name up higher on the list. If anyone does something that proves they're innocent, we cross them off."

The boys stared at the wretched list one final time before Dream folded it up and shoved it into his pocket.

"I hate this. I hate this so much," he grumbled.

George gritted his teeth and nodded. Words couldn't express how much he agreed.

~~~~~

Since that initial meeting, George tried to maintain some sense of normalcy in his schedule. He studied with his roommates every weekend and laughed with his friends over meals in the Great Hall, but that was about as close to normal as he could get.

Between staying up late until well after his roommates were asleep and waking up earlier than all of them, George felt like the bags under his eyes weighed more than all of his textbooks combined.

He hated the way that panic seized him every time one of his friends excused themselves during class, hated the way he paid too much attention to where they were at all times. More than that, he hated the way weeks had gone by without a single name moving up or down the list.

The feeling of being unable to rely on the people he had grown so close to over the past year was killing him slowly every day.

The trio had assigned each other separate roles in their investigation. George's job was to be the first to walk into every class to ensure that no one tried anything suspicious before the lessons started. Dream's job was to be the last person out the door. If anyone failed to show up to class, Dream would excuse himself to the toilet and track the missing person down. So far, the arrangement had lost Slytherin many house points for tardiness and landed Dream in multiple detentions, but the blond refused to let up on his duties.

That was why Dream was especially annoyed one Wednesday morning when a prefect caught him loitering in the halls and escorted him back to class *three whole minutes* before the lesson was due to start. George was already in his seat when his friend walked in, so the Ravenclaw was able to watch with amusement as Dream greeted the professor stiffly and took his seat.

"Stupid frickin prefects, always ruining stuff," the blond muttered under his breath. "And Sapnap said the Gryffindor kids were supposed to be *chill*. Stuck-up tattletales."

George sighed and turned to pull out some parchment before class began, not wanting to feed into Dream's anti-prefect ideals. Just when he finished arranging his ink bottle and quills on his desk, the classroom doors creaked open, revealing an anxious looking Eret. The boy shut the door quietly behind him and shuffled over to their professor at the front of the class.

Dream quirked an eyebrow in George's direction, a silent question in his eyes.

Eret cleared his throat. "Professor Flitwick, can I uh—" he glanced up at Dream and George, who were both trying their hardest to look like they were minding their own business, before lowering his voice, "may I have a word?"

George stared at the parchment in front of him intently as Dream stretched and craned his neck to listen in on the conversation. They watched from the corners of their eyes as Eret pulled out a book and pointed to one of the paragraphs. Professor Flitwick adjusted his spectacles and squinted at the tiny print.

"Well, Mr. Eretson," George heard his Head of House say, "the Disillusionment Charm isn't part of the second-year curriculum. The charm is much too advanced, you see. You will learn it in time for your O.W.L.s, though, I assure you!"

"O.W.L.s? You mean we won't learn it until *fifth year*?!" Eret spluttered, "That's a...that's a long time, I need—I want to learn it as soon as possible! Is there any way I can prove to you that I'm

ready to learn it now?"

Professor Flitwick shook his head and smiled. "I'm sorry, my dear boy, but I am not permitted to teach you this charm before the curriculum requires you to know it. I sure do love the Ravenclaw enthusiasm, however!"

Eret glanced up at Dream and George, who were positioned at odd angles so as to listen in on the conversation. Sighing, he closed the textbook and tucked it under his arm. "Thanks anyway, Professor."

"Of course! And please don't hesitate to ask me any other questions regarding *this* year's curriculum, should you ever find the need to do so."

Eret nodded glumly and dragged his feet over to his desk to begin preparing for class.

A loud *thunk* came from beside George, then, and his head snapped in the direction of the sound to see that Dream had pulled out his own textbook and was quickly rifling through its pages.

George glanced over at Eret, but the boy seemed to be too put-out to notice their weird behavior.

"Here!" Dream whisper-shouted to him, slamming his finger onto the page and gesturing for George to come look. George leaned over and began to read the text.

*The Disillusionment Charm (incantation: i' luzi' oŋ) is a concealment charm that disguises a target as its surroundings. The target takes on the exact color and texture of its environment, effectively turning it into a chameleon.*

"I *know* what a Disillusionment Charm is, Dream," George whispered once he finished reading the paragraph.

"Right, but why does Eret need to know it so bad?" Dream hissed back.

George's eyes widened as he realized what Dream was implying. "You mean..."

Without another word, Dream withdrew the suspect list from the inside of his robes and hurriedly dipped a quill in ink. His friend scribbled something down at the bottom of the parchment before passing the note surreptitiously to George for him to read.

*Big sus list:*

- *Eret*

~~~~~


Eret's strange behavior seemed to spark a chain reaction. Suddenly, every one of their friends seemed to take it upon themselves to act as suspiciously as possible in front of George and Dream. What was once a straightforward two man job soon became a full-blown game of hide and seek.

Wilbur and Eret stopped attending their weekend study sessions, leaving George and Techno alone together in the library on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. If that wasn't odd enough, Techno suddenly seemed to have forgotten all the magical theory he'd ever learned in class, meaning George was stuck re-teaching course material in the library until curfew.

Every time George questioned Techno about their other roommates' disappearance, the other boy just stared back at him in confusion and then changed the subject.

"Wilbur? Eret? Well, they definitely aren't *here*," he'd say, furrowing his eyebrows. "They're probably just busy. Hey, can you gimme a rundown on Professor Binns' last lecture? Preferably with, uh, as many details as possible?"

A week before Halloween, George met up with Dream after a study session to talk about progress.

"Anything new? Eret and Wilbur weren't in the library again," George said quietly, glancing around to make sure no one else was listening.

Dream sighed and shook his head. "No. Still can't find them."

"What about your Housemates? Are any of the Slytherins acting odd?"

"Nope. They're the only ones who *haven't* been doing anything suspicious."

George snorted. "That's ironic."

"Yeah," Dream acknowledged, biting his lip. "I worry about you, though. It means you're probably sleeping in the same room as the traitor."

It became much harder for George to fall asleep at night, after that.

~~~~~

Six days before the end of October, Bad began receiving packages in the Great Hall.

George brushed them off, at first; it wasn't weird for people to receive mail, after all. However, George grew suspicious when he noticed that the Hufflepuff boy kept receiving multiple packages *every single day* and wouldn't answer any of Dream's questions on the matter.

Dream and George could do nothing but watch as more and more packages arrived each day. With every new parcel Bad received, George's dread intensified.

Bad wasn't the only one acting odd, however. Three days before the end of October, Wilbur did something that George found *terrifying*.

It was the middle of the night. George was still wide awake when he heard shuffling sounds coming from one side of their room. When the shuffling turned to the sound of approaching footsteps, George snapped his eyes shut and fought to keep his breathing level.

He sensed a figure stop at the foot of his bed. Feeling as though his heart was about to beat out of his chest, George couldn't help but stiffen when he felt a hand reach out and pat him lightly on the head.

"Good Gogi," a voice beside him whispered.

George's heart skipped a beat. He recognized that whisper.

He waited until he was sure the figure was turned away from him, then cracked his eyes open in time to see the person stumble over to the door and exit their room.

George was on his feet before he fully knew what he was doing. He tip-toed down the stairs as quickly as he could, but he still wasn't fast enough to confront the person before they'd successfully managed to flee the common room.

Suddenly, a voice from behind him made George's heart leap into his throat.

"And what are *you* doin' up so late, eh?"

George spun around to face the new person. "I— Philza?" he choked out, eyes widening in surprise. "What are *you* doing here?!"

The prefect raised an eyebrow. "Uh, I live here? Imagine my surprise when I return from night patrols only to hear someone sneaking out of bed minutes later. You go sprintin' down the staircase and didn't think anyone'd hear you?"

"Wh— that wasn't me! That was Wilbur! He snuck out just now! I was trying to stop him, Phil!"

Philza snorted. "Right. So Wilbur walked out, you saw him, and tried to stop him all the way out here instead of back in your dorm room?"

"...yes."

"Ah ha," Phil said sarcastically. "And *where* is the little late night adventurer now, might I ask?"

George shuffled his feet before muttering, "He left."

"Oh did he?"

"Look, come see for yourself! His bed is empty!"

"No no, I believe ya, this whole story is *totally* plausible and not at all suspicious-soundin'."

"Really?" George asked hopefully.

"No. Go to bed."

"But, Wilbur—"

"Will be found by Filch if he really *is* out there. Go to sleep, George. I'm tired."

With one final glance at the common room door, George sighed and dragged his feet back up to his

dorm room. He cringed when he saw Wilbur's empty bed.

*Wilbur.* The mere idea of sunny, smiley, pen-obsessed Wilbur being a Muggle-born-hating terrorist seemed absurd.

But, then again...weren't all of the suspects absurd?

Sleep didn't come easily for George that night. He stared absently at his ceiling until exhaustion finally overtook him.

When he was on the edge of unconsciousness, the wind howling outside his window took on Wilbur's voice.

*Sweet dreams, Gogi,* it whispered to him as he drifted off.

~~~~~

On the morning of Halloween, neither Dream nor George could find any of their friends in the Great Hall. They searched every single table for their usual lunch buddies before Schlatt waved them over to the Slytherin side of the Hall with a grin.

"Davidson! Dream-boat! Get over here!"

That was how George ended up eating breakfast at the Slytherin table.

"Eyy, it's the boys!" Schlatt cheered once they were all seated. "How are ya doing on this fine morning?"

"Well, half our grade has gone missing," Dream replied, nodding over to the other tables.

"Aw yeah? That's weird. I was thinkin that you two looked lost out there."

"I think they're *still* lost," a girl grumbled beside Schlatt.

"Ah, shut it, Minx. Don't you have to go make someone else's life miserable?"

"You're doing my job *for* me with *your* ugly face!" she spat in reply.

Schlatt rolled his eyes and speared a piece of fruit with his fork. "Yeah, yeah. I think your looks might be rubbin off on me. You're a hazard."

"Aren't you the same bastard that almost threw me into the *fireplace* last year?!"

"S'not *my* fault you're built like that, *Log* !"

The two bickering Slytherins locked eyes for a silent, tense moment. George swallowed audibly, trying to remember any sort of argument-diffusing spells they may have learned in charms. Schlatt's glower cracked, his lip curving up slightly, and that was all it took to send them both bursting into laughter.

"Just go mind your own business, Cow," Schlatt snickered, waving her away.

"Gladly. Any chance to get away from *you* bastards is a gift," Minx rolled her eyes, quickly gathering her things and moving away. As she turned away from them, George noticed that she was biting back a smile.

Schlatt sighed and turned back to his fruit, flicking a seed off of an apple slice.

"Um, what was *that*?" George asked, confused by the interaction he'd just witnessed.

"Ignore them," Dream mumbled. "That's just the way they talk."

"Yeah," Schlatt agreed, nodding, "We're always doin stuff to piss each other off. She loves it, though. Freak."

"One day she'll snap, and I'm not volunteering to clean your entrails off the floor." Dream warned him.

"Nah, watch this." He abruptly stood up, then, and turned in the direction of the girl's retreating figure. "MINX HAS A BIG FAT CRUSH ON ME!" he screamed.

"IN YOUR DREAMS, PISS-HEAD!" she yelled back, without missing a beat.

Schlatt's eyes sparkled mischievously as he turned back to Dream. "See? *Massive* crush."

"Right..." Dream huffed, reaching over to take a sip of his drink.

Schlatt snickered, pushing the food around on his plate idly without really eating any of it. He held up a piece of strawberry to his face before grimacing and putting it down.

"Is something wrong with your fruit salad?" the Ravenclaw asked, nodding at Schlatt's food.

"This? Psh, c'mon" the Slytherin waved him off. "This fruit's just grea— *not bad*," Schlatt finished through gritted teeth, glancing up at Dream before aggressively stabbing a piece of cantaloupe.

George furrowed his brows at the strange phrasing before taking a good look at the plates spread out before him. As his eyes scanned the dishes, something dawned on him.

The food at the Slytherin table was noticeably less...good. It wasn't *bad*, as Schlatt had supplied, but it just didn't look as appetizing as the food on the other House tables. The bacon looked just a *little* too dark; the banana peels were littered with bruises; there was no steam coming off of any of the foods that usually arrived piping hot to his table. Small little details that added up to a less enticing spread overall.

"Does your food always look like this?" the Ravenclaw asked.

"Well, they didn't just make it all *spooky* for Halloween," Schlatt chuckled, wiggling his fingers around to emphasize the word. "The food's just part of the package when you join Slytherin."

"What do you mean? If you're in Slytherin it means you have to eat bad food?"

"It's not like it's *inedible*, see?" Schlatt scoffed, popping a grape into his mouth, "Jusht kina shoft."

"Well, yeah..." George said, frowning. "But how does it make sense for your entire House to be eating worse than everyone else?"

Schlatt chuckled and gave the other boy a wry smile. "Davidson, we're not stupid here. We're the snake house. You know, the big bad batch of the bunch. We get the short end of the stick

sometimes, but it's no big— it's just the way things are."

"That's not fair."

"Whatchya gonna do?" Schlatt shrugged. "You know what they say: 'there's not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin.' The house elves giving us some of their burnt bacon isn't the worst thing someone could do to us, especially right after the war."

As George stared at the haphazardly cut fruit on Schlatt's plate. It struck him as odd, how feelings towards Slytherin House were just as divided as feelings towards Muggle-borns.

"Come eat at our table," the Ravenclaw blurted out. "You're our friend too, right? If Dream can join us, so can you."

Schlatt shook his head at the offer. "Nah. It's...you don't have to invite me over just cuz ya feel bad."

"I'm inviting you over because you're Wilbur's friend. Don't be an idiot." George rolled his eyes. "And you're Dreams friend too, which means you're my friend, and I don't want my friends to eat bad food."

Dream nodded. "Yeah, the food over there really *is* a lot better," he said, grimacing at the rubbery eggs on his plate.

"Minx can come too, by the way!" George added, "She seems cool."

"Cool is definitely...a word," Schlatt snickered. "I don't think she'll be too quick to accept the invite, though."

"Well, it's there if she wants it." George said, clearing his throat dramatically. "You are both *cordially* invited to eat at the Ravenclaw table."

Schlatt smiled. "Well, I'll let Minx know, but I, for one, *graciously* accept."

~~~~~

"So *none* of them were in bed this morning?" Dream asked George in the library after breakfast.

"Dream, I wake up at *half past six* just to make sure I beat them all. I'm *positive* they were all gone."

"Hay huys! Hat har he hoin?" Sapnap cut in, appearing over Dream's shoulder as he slid into his spot.

"What the hell is in your mouth— what are you *wearing* ?!" Dream exclaimed, grimacing as Sapnap pulled a set of spit-covered fanged teeth from his mouth.

"That's disgusting," George added.

"It's my costume! I'm a vampire for Halloween!"

"Sapnap, we're on a *manhunt* right now to discover a dangerous *undercover hitman* and you're playing dress up?!" Dream exclaimed.

"Is this why you ditched us during breakfast?" George asked.

"Uh, yeah, it takes *time* to look this good." Sapnap rolled his eyes, gesturing to his messy makeup and gaudy cape. "Seriously, you guys don't know when to unwind."

"Uh, we *do*, and the time is *not now*," George huffed. "None of the prime suspects were at breakfast this morning, and *all of my roommates* were gone when I woke up!" George exclaimed.

Before Sapnap could reply, Dream gasped and put his hand on George's arm.

"George," the Slytherin boy said, eyes wide, "What if they're working together?"

George froze as he processed the suggestion. How had the thought not occurred to him before?

"But— no, that can't be!" Sapnap stammered, shaking his head, "It's— you said Techno's missing, too, right?"

"Oh God, do you think they kidnapped him?!" George gasped, dread pooling in his stomach.

"What?! No *way*, dude. Where would they even go? There's probably a perfectly good explanation for all this," Sapnap insisted, glancing at something over George's shoulder. "Uh, it was nice catching up with you guys, but I gotta skedaddle. Don't stress it, okay? It's Halloween! Live a little! Get a costume! Or, I don't know, go have— go—"

George glanced over his shoulder and spotted Karl standing beside a bookcase, looking in nearly every single possible direction except at him.

"Is Karl waiting for you or something?"

"No? Yes. We have a...a thing— oh! I'm gonna help him with his costume, yeah, he saw mine and wanted one..too..I'm gonna go, bye!"

Sapnap scrambled off, grabbing Karl by the arm and pulling the Hufflepuff behind the bookcase, disappearing from sight.

George turned back to face Dream, scratching his head, "That was..."

"...weird. I didn't even know Sapnap and Karl were friends."

"Sapnap's friends with everyone. I wouldn't be surprised if he and McGonagall were on a first-name basis."

"*Hey Minerva! Wanna see me do a backflip off this staircase?*" Dream squawked in his best Sapnap impression.

"*Hey Minerva! Wanna see me shoot pumpkin juice from my nostrils?*" George squawked back.

"Ew, Gogi, you're so gross."

"It's not *me*, it's Sapnap! I've seen him do it before."

"No you *did not*."

"Ask him during lunch, he'll show you."

"Alright, I will!"

~~~~~

By the time lunch rolled around, the boys were so drained from their Muggle Studies class that they forgot all about the pumpkin juice.

The missing Ravenclaws had all shown up to class acting like nothing happened. Techno even made fun of George when he'd asked where they'd been.

"What're you, our babysitter?" he'd snorted. "We're big boys. We know what we're doin'."

George didn't get the opportunity to ask a followup question, unfortunately, because right at that moment Professor Borealis announced that she decided that they would each have to assemble a chair by hand that lesson.

"I'm sitting on the floor from now on," Wilbur declared, staring forlornly at his misassembled wooden legs. Having given up on finishing the piece of furniture after realizing the screwdriver could not be used as a wand substitute for 'repair'.

"I think...this is written in the wrong language," Eret muttered, flipping through the provided instruction manual confusedly.

"What is *this* ?!" George exclaimed, pulling a curved piece of metal from the tool box.

Wilbur threw his hands up at that. "You too?! Aren't *you* the Muggle-born here?!"

"Yeah, but I never had to *assemble a chair* before! I leave that stuff to my parents!"

"Uh guys? I think I'm done, but I have *no idea* where this belongs." Techno grimaced, scratching the back of his head.

They all turned to see Techno standing before a perfectly assembled chair, a sizable plastic contraption in his hands.

"Techno, where did you get a *car battery* from?!"

"This is a car battery?"

"You're building an IKEA chair, where did you find a car battery!?"

"What the hell is an IKEA?!" Wilbur exclaimed.

"Cars have *batteries* ?" Eret spluttered, looking extremely distressed by the information.

"Yes! Where did you find that, Techno?!"

"I dunno, it was just in my pile. You're tellin' me I *don't* need it for the chair?"

"Professor!"

Once the car battery had been stored away safely and everyone's chair had been graded, they were released for lunch. As the students filed out of the classroom, George felt someone tap him on the shoulder.

"Hey Davidson, that invite still a thing?" Schlatt asked, Minx standing behind him, looking sour.

"Yeah! You're invited too, Minx," George nodded at the Slytherin girl.

"Thanks," she grumbled.

"No problem!" Sensing the tension, George wracked his brain for something friendly to say. Remembering the way Schlatt and Minx had bantered at breakfast, the Ravenclaw boy smiled, adding, "I look forward to eating lunch with you, Cow."

Schlatt's smile froze halfway on his face. The Slytherin boy glanced between Minx's slack jawed expression and George's oblivious smile and bit his lip. Minx looked furious.

"Wh—! *ExCUSE ME?!* " she screeched.

"Uh, was I not...supposed to say that?" George asked, backing away slowly with a nervous chuckle, "Sorry, I thought that was just your nickname or something. I didn't mean to *offend* you by calling you a cow—"

"Oh no, that's *it* !" she screamed, lunging at George just as Schlatt caught her around the waist.

"Put me down, you ugly bastard! Let me at 'im!"

"Don't kill the Ravenclaw! He's our lunch ticket!" Schlatt managed through his coughs of laughter.

"Stop laughing, you *ignoramus* !" Minx yelled, clawing at her Housemate's arms and kicking her legs. "I swear to Merlin I'm avada'ing you the second you let go!"

"Minx, please, I wanna eat!"

"He called me a cow!"

"If I put you down are you gonna rip George's throat out?"

"Duh! Obviously!"

"We'll meet you there, Davidson," Schlatt nodded at George. "I'll get this woman to shut up."

"Oh, so *now* I'm a woman!"

"Oh, shut it, you *horse* !"

"HORSE?!"

Minx thrashed around, finally landing a successful kick in between Schlatt's legs and causing him to double over, setting her free.

"What the hell is **WRONG** with you, *woman* !?" He cried, falling to the ground.

Minx ignored him, her eyes locking onto George.

"I'm gonna carve out your intestines, you bastard," she hissed.

George didn't need to hear the threat twice. Instantly, he turned around and booked it, not looking back once until he was safely seated at the table in between Dream and Techno.

"Um, hey guys, I might need some protection from our lunch guests," George muttered, looking over his shoulder hesitantly. When he noticed that Minx wasn't still hot on his trail, he relaxed and started serving himself.

"Oh? Who did you invite, Gogi?" Wilbur inquired, cocking his head in question.

"Erm, Schlatt and Minx?" He supplied, hoping that everyone else would be alright with the decision.

"Oh, Schlatt's great!" Wilbur grinned. "Haven't had the chance to talk to him in a long time, what with all the... errands I had to go run."

George glanced up at Dream, whose shoulders sagged at the Ravenclaw's evasive phrasing.

"Which one of them did you piss off though?" Wilbur questioned, leaning over the table expectantly.

George winced, "Well, it wasn't on *purpose*, but Minx just got—"

"Oh good God, you're on *Minx's* hit list?!" Wilbur hissed.

Eret let out a sympathetic gasp as Wilbur began to mutter what sounded like a prayer under his breath.

Techno tsked, shaking his head. "So uhh, what was it you wanted engraved on your headstone again?" he asked, grabbing a pen out of his pocket and clicking it open.

"I don't even know why she's mad at me! All I did was say *exactly* what Schlatt said to her earlier. I thought she liked it!"

Wilbur clasped his hands together and started praying harder.

"Mhm, so did you want to be buried or cremated, I didn't catch that," Techno continued.

"I came here so that you'd *protect* me," George pouted, staring at Techno with begging eyes.

"Ah, but you see, the thing is that I actually *like* bein' alive. I enjoy the feelin' of air enterin' my lungs and exitin' my nostrils. I love it when all my organs are inside my body doin' their proper functions. Every mornin' I wake up n' go 'Wow! My heart's beatin'!' and it just makes my whole day, I tell ya."

George groaned, burying his face in his hands. "Dream, please tell me I'm not gonna *actually* die."

"George, I love you, but I won't lie to you."

He glanced at the rest of the table, who all stared at him as though he were already a walking gravestone. Wilbur was still praying. When he realized that nobody was going to reassure him that he would live to see another day, he sighed.

"Great." He huffed, "Well, I'm gonna go sit *elsewhere* so that I can live past my thirteenth birthday, and *you*—"

"Davidson! Leaving so soon? We just got 'ere!" Schlatt cut in, clasping his hands together at the sight of the meal. "Aw this looks great! They really *do* pick favorites here, huh?"

George turned to look at the newcomer with dread, cringing as he noted his disheveled appearance and the bright red hand print on his face. The Slytherin boy seemed totally unbothered by his injuries, however, as he easily slid into the seat beside Wilbur, while a disgruntled looking Minx trailed behind him.

"Schlatt, buddy! How are you doing!" Wilbur grinned, slapping him on the back.

Schlatt winced, "Ah, you know, a little bruised and battered, but I'm ready to *eat* ! Doesn't this food look just the *best*, Minx?"

Minx stared back at the boy with cold eyes. If looks could kill, George thought, Schlatt would be dead. Maybe double dead, if that was even a thing.

Schlatt paid no mind to the death glare, elbowing Minx in the side. The Slytherin girl reached for her fork and stabbed the giant roast chicken in the center of the table aggressively.

"It looks fan- *fucking*- tastic," she spat, glaring at George as she did so. "And if Davidson calls me a bloody *cow* one more time he'll be the next thing on the menu."

"*Cow* ?" Techno whispered to him.

"Schlatt said it first," George grumbled.

"How are you still alive?" Dream muttered under his breath.

Wilbur glanced between Minx and George before clearing his throat. "Well, it's great to see you, Schlatt! I never thought to invite you over because I thought it was obvious that you're always welcome here."

"Eh, can't know how anyone'll act once you turn green on em," he shrugged, scooping up heaps of salad and mashed potatoes onto his plate.

Wilbur snorted, "Oh, that was weak, Schlatt. You'll have to come up with a *much* better excuse to get rid of me," he grinned, squeezing the Slytherin's shoulder in a half hug.

"Don't get all sappy on me, Wilbur, I might throw up on you. And this is *good* food that I don't wanna be throwing up."

"I know you love me."

"I do—" he choked, banging a fist on his chest as he coughed up his food.

"You do?" Wilbur snickered, slapping him on the back, "I never thought I'd see the day when you'd admit it!"

"I was *trying* to say I do *not*! You're gro— you're annoy— ah, forget it, just let me eat."

"Oh, J. Schlatt," Wilbur tsked, shaking his head with a sigh, "You truly are what the Muggles would call a tsundere."

"Wh..." Schlatt lowered his fork down, a look of disgust crawling onto his face, "What the hell did you just call me?" he asked, sounding deeply offended.

"A tsundere! Do you not—? Oi! Sapnap!" Wilbur called, waving at the Gryffindor who was approaching their table, "It's tsundere, right? That's a word?"

Sapnap jogged over to them, leaning over Dream's shoulder. "Huh? Oh, yeah! Tsunderes are a *very* important part of Muggle culture. Borealis'll cover it soon, just wait!"

George quirked an eyebrow in Sapnap's direction, but the first-year simply grinned at him in response.

"Well, what the hell's it mean?!" Schlatt demanded. "Don't just call me random Muggle words, Weirdo, this is why women are so—" He furrowed his eyebrows, seemingly struggling to come up with words.

"Repulsed by him?" Techno supplied.

"That's what I'm *trying* to say." He grumbled.

Minx scoffed, "Oh, yeah, and you're a *real* charmer in comparison."

"Get outta my face, Whale! I said *women*, not *animals*! "

"Really? That's funny, because your face looks just like a baboon's arse!"

"Is that why you wanna kiss it so bad?" He puckered his lips and batted his lashes at her.

Dream shifted uncomfortably in his seat, grabbing a roll from the basket on the table.

"Think again," Minx rolled her eyes, "I'd rather kiss one of those sharp Muggle spinny things that cuts things up small than kiss *you*. "

"A blender?" George asked.

"Yeah! I'd rather shove my entire face in a blender!"

"Ha! Maybe it'll make you look better, too!"

"Oh yeah? Well you should try it as well, then, because you could really use it!"

"Hey George, can you pass me the gravy?" Wilbur asked, ignoring the argument as he reached over Schlatt's shoulder to grab the bowl from George's hand.

"Don't you have some food to finish, Donkey?" Schlatt groaned.

"Donkey? Aww, you're getting creative now!" She exclaimed before smacking her Housemate on the shoulder.

"Has he used pig yet?" Techno asked, biting a fried potato slice.

Beside George, Dream cringed. Schlatt tsked and shook his head. "C'mon, Techno, that one's too far. I'm not *evil*."

"Yeah, sorry, don't know what I was thinkin," Techno apologized, rolling his eyes.

"Why is *pig* where the line is drawn?" George whispered to Dream.

"It's mostly a pureblood thing, but almost every wizard is aware of it," the blond boy replied as

Schlatt and Minx continued their banter. "Pigs are like a bad omen, basically. You know how owls are magical creatures? Well, pigs are the least magical creatures in existence."

When George shot Dream a puzzled look, the other boy rolled his eyes and tried to elaborate. "Listen, all you gotta know is that calling someone a pig is, like, the worst insult *ever* for a pureblood."

"...oh," George replied. "Good to know, then."

The table fell into an oddly comfortable silence after that as everyone busied themselves with scarfing down their food.

"So... how did Karl's costume turn out?" George asked Sappap, who was itching at the uncomfortably high popped collar of his vampire cloak.

"Oh! Pretty great actually, had to get it done quick before his first period but he's lookin snazzy as heck."

"Snapper, hand the greens over, will ya?" Schlatt called to the first-year through a mouthful of some sort of pie.

"And more gravy!" Minx added, tearing meat off of a chicken bone with her teeth, "Wilbur poured it all on his plate, the bastard."

"If he ate it all, where am I supposed to get more from?"

"Well, if the Raven-brains don't have any left I'm sure mighty Gryffindor can spare some gravy, can't they?" Schlatt asked, waving him off, "Go on."

Sappap stared at the two before shrugging. "Looks like I'm an errand boy now, I guess."

"Yeah, that's right. Go get the greens and gravy from Gryffindor! How's that for alliteration?"

"That *was* some nice alliteration," Techno nodded.

"It's all yours, Blade," He waved his fork at him, "If you ever publish it in some sorta book and make hella cash off of it, make sure to give me my cut."

"Duly noted, ten percent of the proceeds go directly to Schlatt."

"T— ten?!" Schlatt cried, nearly choking on his pumpkin juice, "What're you tryin to rip me off here?! That might just be the greatest part of that entire goddamn book! Fifty or I'm suing, and I'm planning on marrying a lawyer so you *bet* I'll be equipped."

Techno shook his head, "Ah, but what you *don't* know is that my *cousin* is a lawyer!"

"What?!"

"Oh yeah, and he's a lawyer *now* so by the time whoever *you're* marryin' becomes a lawyer, my cousin will have studied the law for years!"

"No!"

"I had it all planned out from the start, Schlatt! Ten percent or nothing!"

"Forget it! This isn't over, Blade! Me and my lawyer are gonna take you down!"

Techno pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose with a smirk, “I’d like to see you try.”

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It was a few hours after dinner, during which Schlatt and Minx had also joined them, that George was making his way over to the astronomy tower. He had taken a nice nap right beforehand in preparation, so he was more than ready to observe some stars.

As he hauled himself up the stairs, he noticed how strangely quiet it was. Usually there were quite a few students grumbling to themselves and each other about how annoying these midnight lessons were. Today, however, it seemed that nobody was interested in complaining. Or, for that matter, in showing up.

He shrugged it off, reaching for the doorknob once he had gotten to the classroom only to find that it was locked. He fiddled with the knob for a bit before huffing and reaching into his robe for his wand.

“Woah there, Gogi, what’s going on?” A voice called from behind him.

“Wilbur?” George asked, turning to face the roommate who had just appeared behind him, “Where is everybody? The door to the class is locked, and—”

“Oh, didn’t you hear?” Wilbur interrupted, taking a step closer to him, “Professor Sinistra was called for a meeting with McGonagall today. Our class is cancelled!”

“O-oh really?” George asked, suddenly hyper-aware of the fact that he was alone with one of the prime suspects in their case. “W-well that’s weird, how did you find out?”

“They told us all right after dinner! You were probably asleep, then. Sorry we didn’t tell you.”

“Oh, it’s not your fault,” George gulped. “S-so I guess it’s back to the common room with us, right?” he chuckled nervously.

Wilbur shook his head with a smile, “Oh, no, not for us.”

George felt his stomach drop. It couldn’t be. Not Wilbur.

“L-listen Wilbur, you don’t have to do this.” George stammered.

Wilbur furrowed his eyebrows at that, “Wait, you *know* ?!” he cried. “Who told you!”

“N-nobody, I figured it out myself, but *please* listen to me, okay? I— you don’t have to—”

“Oh come *on*, I’ve been planning this thing for *weeks* ! I’m not just gonna let it all go to waste!” he huffed, rolling his eyes.

“Wilbur, please—!”

“Nope! You’re not changing my mind! Get ‘im, boys!”

All at once, a blindfold was put over his eyes and somebody grabbed him from behind, hauling him up over their shoulder.

“Wait! Stop!” He screamed, kicking at the person underneath him, “Wilbur, please, this isn’t necessary! You don’t have to do this!”

“We missed our chance last year, Gogi, we’re not gonna miss it again!” Wilbur declared as George held back a sob. “I’ll see you there!”

## Chapter End Notes

According to AO3 statistics, only a small percentage of readers actually leave kudos. If you enjoyed this update, please consider leaving kudos and a comment. It's free, anonymous, and it lets us know you want us to write more!

Go shout at me (KangarooKen) on tumblr: [kangarooken.tumblr.com](http://kangarooken.tumblr.com)

Go read Gra55's other fic, an epic PJO AU, here:  
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/25270081>

## Chapter Twelve || Year Two

### Chapter Summary

George gets a surprise. Winter holidays begin.

### Chapter Notes

Hello! We're back again with another insanely long update because we're maniacs. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George thrashed in the arms of his captors as they dragged him down several different sets of stairs.

“HELP! I’M BEING KIDNAPPED, HE—”

“*Quietus!* Blimey, George, what’s the matter with you? Stop screaming,” Wilbur muttered after casting the quietening charm.

George tried to scream again, but his voice came out all broken and squeaky. Rendered practically mute, he had no choice but to struggle silently. There were several pairs of arms restraining him — who were the other kidnappers? Eret? Schlatt? Were *all* of his friends secretly pureblood supremacists?

No, not all of them were. He still had Dream.

Dream, who likely had no clue what was happening to George and would be worried sick about him come morning.

Another jolt of pure terror seized George’s frame as the thought occurred to him. Would he even be *alive* in the morning?

The sound of a door being wrenched open tore him out of his panicked thoughts. He suddenly became hyper aware of the sounds around him. Whispers and hushed voices quieted as he drew near — wherever he was, there were definitely multiple people already in the room.

Was he being taken out of Hogwarts? One couldn’t apparate on Hogwarts grounds and there were dozens of security measures in place to prevent students from leaving via the Floo network, but perhaps his captors were smart enough to smuggle him out anyway. Maybe a portkey?

...Or perhaps they just brought him into a secluded room so they could kill him quietly.

*I’m sorry, Mum and Dad, was George’s last thought as he prepared himself for death. I never got to say goodbye. I’m sorry Sapnap. I’m sorry Dream. I’m so so sorry—*

Abruptly, his captors released him. He stumbled blindly to the floor, feeling cold tile beneath his

hands and knees.

“*Nonquiescis*, ” Wilbur muttered, the counter-spell immediately clearing George’s throat.

*That’s odd*, he thought. *Why would they let me speak?*

“George,” Wilbur’s voice cut through the silence. The other Ravenclaw sounded...amused. “You can take the blindfold off, now.”

“Why?” George spat bitterly. “You want me to *watch* you kill me?”

A cough sounded from somewhere across the room. George could hear Wilbur shuffle nervously beside him.

“Um...pardon?” the other boy said, sounding confused.

George felt tears stinging the back of his eyes, but he refused to let them spill. He wouldn’t give the monsters the satisfaction of seeing him cry.

“I won’t do it. I thought you were my *friend*, Wilbur. I- I *trusted* you!” his voice cracked as he bit back a sob. “I-I thought you d-didn’t care about blood status or whatever, but I guess I was wrong. You put on a convincing act, Wilbur. I really *truly* believed you.”

The entire room was silent apart from George’s words echoing around them. God, the other kidnappers probably thought he was an idiot, but he didn’t care. Why couldn’t it have been some random third party? The fact that the attacker was one of his friends made everything hurt so much worse.

“George, what are you—”

“Save it! I don’t want to hear any of your justifications, okay? Why couldn’t you have just been evil from the start?!” he spat, voice wavering. “Why did you have to make me believe that I was your friend? And Techno, too! Why— why did you have to *lie*?! Isn’t it enough that you’re going to attack us? T-to kill us?”

“*Kill?!?*”

“Oh my *god*, ” somebody grumbled from behind him, taking long swift strides in his direction, “Let’s get this over with before he embarrasses himself even more.”

George’s heart leapt into his throat. This was it. He was going to die. “Just know that my muddy blood will be on *your* hands!” He screamed, “You won’t get away with this! You’re—”

The blindfold was torn off of his face in one swift movement and his voice cut off.

The first thing his eyes registered was fire. The room was pitch-black except for a single flame burning atop a wooden table — a *candle*, George realized. As his vision became more focused, he saw that the candle was embedded in something wide and round.

A cake.

George’s gaze snapped to the other faces in the room. In the light of the candle’s faint glow, he saw familiar faces staring back at him with puzzled expressions. He recognized Karl standing nervously off to the side, shifting uncomfortably as he fiddled with a wrapped gift box in his hand. Schlatt and Minx sat at the table beside the cake, the former of whom was pinching the bridge of



his nose in exasperation while the latter had turned her head to the side to avoid looking at the spectacle. Or maybe to hide a chuckle. Across from them was Bad, who had a shocked looking first-year clinging to his sleeve.

What the hell kind of kidnapping *was* this?

The person behind him cleared their throat awkwardly, “Ehhh...surprise?” Techno’s monotone voice said hesitantly from behind him.

“Geez, guys, we scared Noobidson half to death. I *told* you your idea of surprises was messed up.”

“Don’t blame me, Gémure-Boye. This was all Wilbur’s idea.”

The words of the quidditch players behind him made George freeze up all over again.

This...wasn’t a kidnapping?

As all of the little details came together, George suddenly wished this really *was* a kidnapping so that he could die on the spot instead of having to face the incredible embarrassment to come.

Presents. Birthday cake. God, he was such an idiot. He was at a birthday party.

A *surprise* birthday party. Arranged by Wilbur. For *him*.

George looked up at his curly haired roommate, who looked like he was thinking the exact same thing. “Well...” he began, glancing around at everyone else in the room before looking back at George, “Happy....Birthday?”

Suddenly, there was a loud crash from the room’s entrance.

“Everyone STOP!” A voice screamed and Dream came bursting through the door with Sapnap sprinting closely behind him, “This is a TERRIBLE IDEA—!”

The blond froze when he noticed George on the floor. His eyes drifted to the blindfold hanging limply in Techno’s hands and the uncomfortable stances of the rest of the partygoers.

“Oh my god....” He grimaced, turning to George. “You went off, didn’t you?”

George stared guiltily at the floor.

Dream swivelled around to look at Sapnap. “Merlin, Sapnap, WHY THE *HELL* WOULD YOU LET THEM DO THIS?!” he yelled at the first-year behind him.

“They only told me about this party TODAY! I didn’t know they were gonna *kidnap him!*” Sapnap yelled back, throwing his arms in the air. “That’s why I ran to tell you when I found out!”

Dream ran a hand through his hair, “God, Wilbur—!”

“Dude, can ya stop pointin’ fingers at everyone?” Techno cut in with a roll of his eyes. “Obviously, nobody here thought that George would freak out n’ think we were instigatin’ a racially motivated attack against him.”

“What *I’m* trying to understand is why none of you *told* me!” Dream cried.

“Because you woulda blabbed about it,” GB80 huffed.

“No I would *not*— !”

“Dream, please,” Techno stopped him. “Let’s not have *two* people embarrassin’ themselves here tonight.”

Even George had to admit to himself that the logic was sound. It would’ve been impossible for Dream to keep the party a secret when he spent nearly every spare minute with George. In fact, the surprise party was probably the reason Sapnap had been acting strange earlier that day.

Another thought occurred to George, then, as he contemplated the surprise. All of the odd behaviors he and Dream had interpreted as suspicious now had an alternate explanation. All of his friends acting weird and dancing around him, Wilbur and Eret avoiding their study sessions, Bad’s strange packages...

His friends hadn’t been planning to *kill* him. They’d been arranging a whole party behind his back.

A tense silence filled the room. Dream was still looking around in exasperation, trying to find someone to blame for the entire situation, but everyone else in the room had the same guilty expression plastered across their faces.

“Welp!” Schlatt stood up, clapping his hands together. “Obviously, everything that happened here was a huge mistake, right, boys?”

Everyone nodded.

“Well, then what are we all standing around looking stupid for? This is a *party*! Wilbur had to do a whole search to find the passage to the kitchens for this meal! Let’s not let an accident ruin the good mood, alright? Now, everyone say sorry to George for making him piss his pants.”

George rolled his eyes, “I did *not* —”

“Sorry, George,” the room chorused.

Schlatt smiled and turned to George. “Now, George, say sorry to everyone for calling them terrorists.”

“I—” George began, staring at everyone else before sighing. “Sorry for calling you terrorists...”

Mumbles of forgiveness filled the room.

Schlatt clapped his hands once more and gave the group some sort of signal. “Great! Surprise! Happy Birthday Davidson!”

“Surprise!”

A party popper was cracked open and confetti soon littered the floor. Wilbur offered George a hand and proceeded to pull him into a hug.

“Merlin, Gogi, I’m so sorry,” Wilbur whispered to him as Schlatt began distributing snacks to everyone.

“I-I’m sorry too, I really didn’t— I didn’t want to believe that you—”

“No, it was totally understandable,” Wilbur shook his head, pulling away from the hug in order to look George in the eyes. “It was pretty stupid to just grab you in the middle of the night, blindfold you, and throw you into some random room without warning. I wasn’t thinking about how scary it

might be for you, I-I didn't even realize how lucky I am to not have to be afraid that my friends are gonna turn on me like that. Over something I can't control."

"No! It's not like that, I—"

"George, we all heard you. I— you don't need to try to explain yourself. I'm really sorry. I'll do better, okay?"

George opened his mouth to respond, but no words came out. How was he going to explain his reaction? He couldn't exactly expose their little investigation, so how could he tell Wilbur that one of his friends really *was* someone to fear?

"Davidson, get over here!" Schlatt called out before George could think of something else to say. "Minx looks like she's gonna take a whole chunk outta your cake before you even get to blow this candle out!"

"Shut up, you *arse*! I don't even need to be here!"

"Then leave," he challenged, staring her down.

Minx scowled and held his gaze before turning away and crossing her arms. "Whatever."

"Yeah, that's what I thought. Cow."

"Enough with the *cow*!" she screeched, aiming a plastic fork at his throat.

George sighed as Wilbur gave him one final pat on the back before guiding him over to the table. The cake, he noticed, was covered in blue frosting, and so, too, were most of the other things in the room. The tablecloth was blue, as were the utensils, the plates, the streamers, and the party hats.

"How— where did you find so many blue things?" George stammered.

"Oh, you wouldn't believe it!" Wilbur exclaimed, "I was out looking for a room for your party one night because Philza told me that the common room would be off limits for something like this. He gave me permission to leave, don't worry. He even told me where to look for the Room of Requirement!"

*That must've been the night when Philza stopped me from going after Wilbur,* George realized.

"Wait, Philza was in on all of this, too?"

"Yup! At first we planned on doing everything by ourselves, but then Eret was told he couldn't learn the Disillusionment Charm to hide the presents, so we recruited him to the team. In the end we just got Bad to keep them in his room instead, but that's not the point—"

"Hey, Wil?" Schlatt cut in. "No offense, but can you tell the birthday boy all of this *afterwards*? I don't think I can hold Minx back for long."

"You're such a stupid *bastard*," Minx hissed.

"Then lay off the goddamn cake!"

"It's sitting right *there* and he's not even eating it now, anyways!" she cried.

"Davidson, just make a wish and let her eat. She's acting like she's gonna starve."

"I'm *hungry*!"

“We just ate a few hours ago!”

“I have a fast frickin metabolism, okay?”

Schlatt groaned, massaging his temples. “Just shut up, Minx, shut up. Is everyone ready? Haaaappy birthday to— ow!”

“Don’t tell me to shut up!” she spat, waving the plastic knife around in her hand menacingly.

“What the hell is wrong with you, woman?!” Schlatt rubbed his shoulder painfully where the plastic knife had bounced off of him. “Ah, Wil, call St. Mungo’s!”

“Stop crying!” Minx yelled, “It barely scratched you!”

“Somebody call a healer!”

Wilbur elbowed George’s side, looking pointedly at the lit candle on the cake and then back at him.

“I’ll give you something to call a healer for, you whiny bastard!”

“Minx, I have one thing to say to you,” Schlatt grimaced.

“And what’s that?”

“If you want that cake so bad, why don’t you have a bite?!”

With that, Schlatt’s hand came up to grip the back of her head and shove it right into the side of the cake.

George gasped and looked away. There was no way that Schlatt would be making it out of this one alive.

Minx screeched and waved her fists in every direction, her threats muffled by a mouthful of cake. Schlatt grinned and plucked the candle from the remaining pastry before depositing it on top of Minx’s head and blowing it out gently.

“Clear the area to the doorway, everyone,” Techno sighed as Schlatt shot a semi-apologetic look in George’s direction.

A well placed plastic knife slash hit Schlatt’s arm and he recoiled with a yell, freeing Minx from the cake. The blue icing covering her face and hair couldn’t even begin to mask her murderous rage.

“I’m gonna KILL YOU!” she shrieked.

“Alright, thanks for the invite, Wil! We’ll be leaving now! Might be back later!” Schlatt called over his shoulder as he raced towards the doorway, throwing it open and sprinting down the hall with Minx hot on his trail. Her screams and threats could be heard well after the door had slammed shut behind them.

The partygoers stared at the ruined cake in silence. The first-year sitting next to Bad leaned over and poked it with a fork.

“Well...” he trailed off, considering the piece of cake on his fork.

"Skeppy, don't do it, please." Bad grimaced, "You said you would behave."

"I'm pretty sure anythin' he does right now would be considered better behavior than whatever just went down," Techno sighed.

"Exactly! My plans are *ruined*!" Skeppy cried, "Are you really gonna take away the *one thing* that could bring me happiness right now?"

"Smashed cake is the only thing that can bring you happiness right now?" Karl snickered.

"Yes."

"Well— I— but that's *gross*!" Bad exclaimed.

"I can't believe you would say that." Skeppy sniffled, wiping a fake tear from his eye.

"You know what, Skeppy? You're right." Sapnap said, walking over to the cake and forking a piece of his own. "What we need to do now is eat some smashed cake and relax. This is gonna be a *fun party*, okay?"

"Yeah!" cheered the rest of George's friends.

It *did* end up being a fun party. The boys all laughed and danced and ate snacks until the early hours of Saturday morning. George received so many wonderful gifts that he doubted he'd be able to carry them all back to Ravenclaw Tower without assistance. Luckily, his roommates volunteered to help. Well, Wilbur and Eret volunteered to help; Techno still claimed he was too injured to do any "heavy liftin'."

It was nice to forget about the investigation for a night. For once, George was just a thirteen-year-old boy celebrating his birthday with his friends.

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A week and a half after his surprise party, George noticed that the quidditch players all seemed to have acquired heavy bags under their eyes. As the first games of the season drew nearer, the captains of all the House teams began training around the clock. It seemed to George like the pitch was never empty anymore — there was always a team running drills outside, no matter the weather. On most mornings, Techno was already out on the pitch before anyone else was awake.

"What time did you wake up this morning, Techno?" George asked his roommate as the second-years made their way to lunch after Charms.

"Uh, about... five? Maybe earlier?" the other boy estimated, yawning.

George's jaw dropped. "*Five*? You're joking. Why do you need to wake up that early?!"

"Eloise wants us to have longer practice sessions," Techno said with a shrug. "We did six rounds o' suicides today."

The boys took their seats at the Ravenclaw table, George still not believing his ears. "What do you mean, you did six rounds of *suicides*?"

"Chill out, man, it's just a sprinting drill," GB80 cut in, swinging his legs over the bench and digging right into the lunch spread. "Vovchuk has us do 'em too."

"But why are they called *suicides*?"

“Cause they’re so exhausting you feel like dying afterwards. Pass me the soup ladle?”

More second-years filed into the Hall soon. Dream plopped himself right next to George, Schlatt and Minx following close behind.

“Alright, let’s see what’s on the menu today, boys!” Schlatt declared, leaning over the table expectantly as he threw his bag down by his feet. “Soup?! Is this some kinda joke?”

Eret looked up from the textbook he was reading to glare at Schlatt. “If you don’t like the food here, you can always return to your own table, you know.”

“Oh I know, but I’m willin to bet that the warm flavored water at our table’s been *pissed in*. I like my chances here better,” Schlatt snickered, dipping a roll into the serving bowl.

“Oh come on, it can’t *possibly* be that bad,” Eret huffed, rolling his eyes.

“It *really is*,” Dream cut in.

“Yeah, I’m glad I booked a seat at this table. If I had to go into Quidditch season on a Slytherin table diet, it’d be a nightmare.” GB80 grimaced.

“Yeah, now you have no excuse for terrible performance,” Techno snickered.

“Just admit I’m good, Techno, it won’t kill you.”

“Wait, what position do you play again?”

GB80 rolled his eyes. “In a few years when I’m the number one quidditch player in the world and you’re begging me to be on your team, I’ll remember this.”

“Yeah, remember how I welcomed you to *my* table and fed you food from *my* plate so you wouldn’t become malnourished.”

“It— well, how does that even make sense?” Eret asked, slamming his book shut as he diverted the conversation back to its original matter, “You guys are the first Slytherins *ever* to realize that your table has worse food than everyone else?”

“Maybe it’s something that just started recently?” Wilbur shrugged, “I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s a new post-war development. I’ve heard some people say pretty nasty things about our favorite snakes.” He threw his arms around the shoulders of Minx and Schlatt, who sat on either side of him, and squeezed them tightly.

“Get off of me, you dirtbag!” Minx cried, the movement caused some soup to spill on her lap. “What the hell!”

“Wil, paws off or I’m biting you,” Schlatt threatened. Wilbur tucked his arms away with a chuckle.

“I can’t imagine why anyone would wanna say anything bad about them,” Eret deadpanned.

“Aw, they care deep down,” Wilbur assured him. “We’ve all just got different ways of expressing ourselves, don’t we?”

“I’d like to *express* my desire for you to pass me some more bread,” Schlatt said, elbowing Wilbur..

“Could you express it *kindly*?”

“Do you have arms? Can you pass me the goddamn bread?”

“Schlatt, I’m trying to make a case for you and you’re making it very hard for me.” Wilbur huffed.

Schlatt groaned, reaching over Wilbur to grab the bread himself.

“Maybe Schlatt isn’t the best example to illustrate my point...” the curly-haired Ravenclaw trailed off.

“C’mon Schlatt, you’re giving us a bad name here,” Dream snickered, “Try being nice for once, geez.”

Schlatt considered his words for a second before shrugging, “Nah, I don’t wanna.”

“Oh come *on* , Schlatt,” Dream said with a chuckle. “Just tell us the truth, already!”

Schlatt froze, looking up at Dream slowly. “Alright, I will. The truth is that Wilbur’s actually a great friend, and I don’t think he’s that annoying. I really appreciate Davidson inviting us over to this table where I get to eat actual good food and catch up with my Ravenclaw friends. I really *wasn’t* sure if any of you guys were gonna want me around here because of—”

“Woah, woah, woah! Okay, stop! Too much truth! You’re freaking me out!” Dream cut him off, waving his arms around frantically.

Minx stared at her fellow Slytherin with a slack-jawed expression as Schlatt paused his ramblings. “Are you *dying*?!”

“What? No! Geez, am I not allowed to get serious without the world ending?” Schlatt replied smoothly, discarding his soggy piece of bread which he’d accidentally drowned during his tirade.

“Schlatt, that was the nicest thing you’ve ever said about me.” Wilbur sniffled, pulling the Slytherin into a tight hug. “It’s a miracle. This is even better than the day I learned about pens!”

Schlatt squirmed in his grip. “Can’t breath, goddamnit! Let me go!” he croaked.

“Why would you think we wouldn’t want you around, Schlatt?” George asked, glancing at the struggling figure in Wilbur’s death grip. “Is— is it because you’re in Slytherin?”

Wilbur paused, giving Schlatt temporary space to breathe. “Wh— seriously?” the Ravenclaw asked as Schlatt shot him a glare. “I thought you were joking about that! What kind of friend judges someone based on their House? You can’t *decide* which one you’re in. That’s ridiculous.”

“I-I think I’m gonna go now,” Eret cut in, standing from his seat. “I...have some last minute things to do. I’ll be in the library.” With that, he excused himself from the lunch table and scrambled away.

There were a few moments of awkward silence following Eret’s abrupt departure, but Dream was quick to change the subject by bringing up quidditch again.

“So... when’s the first House match?” he asked GB80.

The other Slytherin’s heterochromatic eyes lit up in excitement. “Tomorrow! We’ve been practicing like crazy, I better see everyone here in green tomorrow.”

“Imagine rooting for Slytherin.” Sapnap chimed in from a few seats away, rolling his eyes, “Gryffindor’s *so* gonna beat you. I bet you’re scared.”

“Scared? Of Gryffindor?” GB80 scoffed, “Not a chance.”

“Do you even *know* anyone from the Gryffindor team?” Dream asked.

“Nope, and I don’t need to,” GB80 said confidently. “Do we even *know* a Gryffindor who isn’t this guy?” He thrust his fork in Sapnap’s direction.

“Uh, Skeppy’s pretty cool,” Techno replied.

“Yeah, they’ve got some alright kids there,” Schlatt agreed in between spoonfuls of soup.

“And who do *you* know from there?” Dream quirked his eyebrows at him.

Schlatt snickered, rolling his eyes. “Oh, so what, you’re the only Slytherin allowed to have a Gryffindor first-year followin him around? C’mon Dream-boat, I’m allowed to socialize, aren’t I?”

“Oh, you bastard, you didn’t even tell him you moved seats, did you?” Minx asked, punching him in the shoulder. “What the hell is wrong with you?!”

“Why are you always so *violent*?!” Schlatt cried.

“The poor kid’s probably been looking for you everywhere, you arse! Go find him and invite him over!”

“What are you, our mother?”

“It’s called *empathy*, you moron!” She pushed him off the bench. “Don’t come back here without him!”

“Geez, alright, alright, just try not to eat everything while I’m gone, okay?”

“*Leave!*” She screamed, and Schlatt disappeared.

“They’re gonna have to get a bigger table for Ravenclaw at this rate.” Wilbur chuckled.

“Well, we’d invite you over to *our* side, but you’d get food poisoning,” Minx said, before quickly adding, “Not that that would be a *bad* thing.”

“Aw, Minx! I didn’t know you cared.” Wilbur grinned, patting her arm.

“I never said I *cared* —!”

“Uh, hey! So who’s Schlatt bringing over?!” Sapnap cut in, cutting Minx off, “I didn’t really notice anyone ever ditching Gryffindor to go hang out with the Slytherins.”

“Yeah, cuz you’re always *here*,” George stated, rolling his eyes. “*Obviously* you wouldn’t notice.”

“I’m not *always* here.”

“Sapnap, when was the last time you ate at Gryffindor?” Dream asked.

“Well...” Sapnap paused, considering the question, “It would’ve been *awkward* if I sat and ate with everyone while you two were at the hospital so...”

“Why haven’t your prefects kicked anyone off yet? Aren’t those nerdy bastards always walking

around with sticks up their arses?” Minx demanded, huffing.

“What’re you complaining about? We get full access to better food,” GB80 cut in.

“Sides, Philza probably has ‘em all lookin the other way.” Techno explained, “He’s the greatest. If there was ever a man that belonged on one o’ those chocolate frog card things...”

“Is there a way to nominate people?” Wilbur asked. “How many owls till they cave, do you think?”

“Hey, Cow! I brought a Gryffindor kid over, like you asked!” Schlatt’s voice rang out above the din of the Great Hall.

“Well, it took you long enough!” She yelled back.

“Scoot over, Snapper, this one’s more important.” Schlatt pushed Sapnap aside and guided a confused, terrified looking first-year to the bench.

The group of second-years stared at the younger student in silence while Schlatt took a seat beside him and draped an arm over his shoulder.

Techno cleared his throat. “Uh, hey—?”

“Schlatt, you—! Who the f— who the hell is *that*?!” Minx cried.

“It’s a Gryffindor first-year,” Schlatt grinned. “Right, buddy?”

The kid nodded quietly, staring intently at the plate in front of him without saying a word.

“What the *hell* is wrong with you?!” Minx spluttered, “Merlin, you’re an idiot!”

“Sapnap, who is that?” George asked.

“That—”

“C’mon, Davidson, why don’t you ask the kid himself?! It’s rude to talk about someone when they’re right in front of you.”

“You know what else is rude? Abducting small children who don’t want anything to do with you! Go put him back!” Minx demanded.

“But he just got here!”

“Take him back, I said!”

Schlatt sighed. “Minx, I want to eat. One second you want the kid—”

“I didn’t mean some *random* kid, I meant—”

“—the next second, you don’t. Can you make up your mind?”

“Uh, Schlatt?” Techno cut in. “Just, as a general table rule, we kinda have a ‘no forcin unsuspectin kids to eat lunch with everyone’ policy here. You know, to keep the order n’ everything.”

“Aww, well why the hell did no one tell me?! Minx, look at what you’ve done.” Schlatt shook his head, patting the Gryffindor kid on the shoulder. “C’mon champ,” he huffed. “We gotta get you back to your red people.”

With that, Schlatt disappeared, leaving a seething Minx to curse his name under her breath while the Ravenclaw boys exchanged puzzled looks.

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George didn't get to meet the *actual* first-year until the Slytherin vs Gryffindor match the next day.

All of the Ravenclaw boys except for Eret had filed into the rickety Slytherin stands, pushing past grumbling older students as they made their way to their friends. Schlatt and Minx were easy enough to find; the former was waving a giant foam finger above his head enthusiastically while the latter was dressed from head to toe in a color George assumed was neon green. Minx had even dyed her hair a shimmery lime-ish color for the occasion, and the face paint she wore reminded George of the cake that covered her face on his birthday.

Even more startling than Minx's appearance, however, was the giant blow-up snake that hissed and twisted in Minx's arms every time she moved.

"Wow, uh, can't quite tell what team you're rootin' for here exactly, Minx." Techno stammered once everyone was seated. "You're a Gryffindor fan, I'm assumin'?"

Schlatt cringed. "God, don't even joke about that. She might bite your head off, man."

"Shut up, you *morons*, the players are coming out now!" Minx yelled, leaping to her feet. "WOO! GO SLYTHERIN! WIPE THE FLOOR WITH THOSE—"

Not even the deafening cheers of the other Slytherin students could drown out the very loud string of creative profanities that followed. George had to admit: he was fairly impressed by Minx's vocabulary. He hadn't known that many insults even existed.

The game soon began, and it was obvious from the start who the winners would be. Much to Minx's delight, the Slytherin team completely demolished the Gryffindors with a final score of 200-10. The stands had to be evacuated immediately after Vovchuk caught the snitch and one of Minx's green smoke bombs exploded due to her excitement.

Green smoke coated their hair and robes as the group exited into the field, wheezing and coughing.

"Oh wow, looks like you guys were partyin a little too hard in the serpent stands, eh?" An unfamiliar voice rang out above the hacking. "You should've invited me! Our side was so boring that I didn't even wanna be seen there."

"Boring, huh?" Schlatt coughed, spitting out a mouthful of smoke residue. "Aren't you just a poor thing?"

"I *am* poor, Schlatt. I'm very poor, and you didn't put in any charity work for a poor little boy like me." The newcomer sniffled.

Blinking through the tears in his eyes, George could see a blurry figure standing with his arms folded across his chest.

"Sorry, there's just somethin' about this situation right now that doesn't really put me in the most 'charitable' mood." Schlatt huffed, just as a popper in Minx's hand exploded and sprayed him with green confetti.

"Would you just throw those things in the GODDAMN TRASH ALREADY?!" He screamed, lunging at Minx. "Gimme that!"

"Back off, you slimy bastard!" Minx spat, kicking him away from her party supplies as she continued to cough.

"No! If another one of these *goddamn* poppers explode, Minx, I don't even know what I'm gonna do to you!"

"Woah, chill out man, it's just a popper," the newcomer chuckled nervously.

Schlatt whirled around to face the Gryffindor with a glare. "Quackity, I swear to God, do you know what my insides look like right now? Do you wanna know? Because to me it feels like Shrek's *ass cheeks* have taken residence in my lungs—"

"Okay, who the *hell* is Shrek?"

"Who the—!" Schlatt spluttered, "No. Oh my god. You— you're joking, right? I know it's originally a Muggle thing, but even *I* know who Shrek is. Please, Quackity, tell me you're joking!" The Slytherin grabbed the younger boy by the shoulders, shaking him back and forth in an increasingly distressed manner.

"Why?! Why would it be a joke?!" He cried, clutching onto Schlatt's arms as his brain rattled a little too hard in his skull. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Please! Who is it?! Are they famous? I'll find out, oh my god!"

"Is Shrek *famous*?! Is that what you just asked me?!" Schlatt cried. "Are you all hearin this?!"

"Dude, what's a Shrek?" Dream murmured in between coughs, glancing up from his keeled over position just in time to see a look of horror coming across Schlatt's face.

"Oh my god, do none of you know even the most *basic* aspects of Muggle culture? Holy— Davidson, please help me out 'ere."

"Shrek? It's a kids' movie, isn't it?" George asked

Schlatt groaned, dropping Quackity to the ground in order to slap his own face in exasperation, "What the hell kind of society is this?!" He cried, throwing his arms up in the air. "How did your parents raise you?!"

"Badly..." Dream muttered.

"I can *tell*! Aw, that explains it! Is this what no Shrek does to a man? Is this why you're all like this?" He grimaced, looking at all the coughing students around him.

"*I* watched Shrek," Technoblade chimed in, raising his hand.

"See? Look at him." Schlatt stumbled over to Technoblade and gestured at his gagging figure, "Look at him! What a beautiful specimen. What a *man*. His value as a human being is just..." Schlatt trailed off and then sighed, "Who wouldn't want to be him?!"

Technoblade raised his own hand.

"Put it down, Technoblade. It's either yourself or one of these non Shrek watchers. Please. Pick the *right* side."

Technoblade put his hand down.

“When in the bloody hell did you guys both have the time to meet this guy?” Wilbur wheezed, wiping the tears from his eyes with the sleeve of his robe and only managing to spread more green residue on them.

“Meet—? Wilbur, what the hell are you talkin about?” Schlatt asked.

"Schlatt, please tell me, where can I go watch this guy?" Quackity asked, clambering to his feet, "Does he live in the castle? Is he here? I'll go there now, I'll observe him."

“Who?!”

“Shrek! I want to watch him, I wanna see what he does that’s so interesting, okay?! Just tell me where to go, please, I need to know!"

"Quackity, it's a movie." Schlatt snickered.

The Gryffindor furrowed his eyebrows at the word, "So...his name is Shrek. And he's a.... moo-vee?"

Schlatt's jaw dropped. "No. You’re not serious, are ya? I refuse to believe— Stop—!"

"What's a movie?"

"Oh my GOD!"

~~~~~

Eret had laughed at them when they met up again after the game, fetching his roommates a change of robes and casting a cleaning spell on them before they could get green muck all over their room

“When did you learn the Scouring Charm, Eret?” George asked the other boy, surprised. “I thought *Scourgify* wasn’t taught until fourth year.”

Eret shrugged and tucked his wand away. “I’ve been studying.”

“Clearly.”

“Anyway,” Eret said, changing the subject, “ *Please* tell me you guys didn’t invite Minx to our side for next week's game. I like blue as much as the next guy, but I rather like my current skin tone.”

George shrugged, “I mean, at least it’ll be a color that I can actually see properly.”

Eret considered his words for a moment. “You know, I might go cheer on Hufflepuff. I’m sure Bad and Karl would appreciate—”

“Oh *no*, you don’t! You’re sitting with us whether you like it or not!” Wilbur declared, throwing his arm around Eret’s shoulder. “You’ve been avoiding the group *way* too much recently, always off on your little lunchtime adventures. Don’t betray us during Quidditch games, too.”

George froze at the words. Had Eret really been missing *that* often? Sure, the other boy hadn’t been spending much time with them in the Great Hall, but he hadn’t abandoned them entirely...right?

George racked his brain, trying to remember the last time Eret had spent time with them outside of

class. To his shock, he came up blank.

There had to be some sort of reasonable explanation for Eret's absence. George probably just had to ask him about it.

No, George. Remember what happened the last time you ran around investigating your friends? his thoughts reminded him. You hurt Wilbur's feelings. You called him a traitor.

George decided not to press his other roommate.

The thought, however, never left him.

Without even noticing it, George had subconsciously begun to fall back into his investigative routine. Staying up late into the night, and waking up earlier than everyone else. Feeling shivers run down his spine whenever Eret excused himself during class. Noting the days when Eret would ditch their group hangouts to go do "last minute things."

Eret, in turn, must have started noticing that George was onto him. That, George reasoned, was why he was trying to make himself look less suspicious by joining them for meals a little bit more often as time went on.

Eret was trying to fit in, George realized. Trying not to look like the big fat traitor that he was.

But...his smile looked so sincere. Eret's one of the most loving and inviting people you know, another part of his brain insisted. This has to be a mistake.

But, later that day, when George peaked over Eret's shoulder when the other boy was writing something, he noticed a few words that made his blood run cold.

Muggle-born roommates.

Eret was writing to someone about him.

When he went looking through Eret's things that night, however, the letter had already been sent to its intended recipient.

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"We can't do this anymore, George."

George looked up from his fifth attempt at reading the same paragraph from their Potions book to shoot Dream a questioning look. The two boys had headed straight to the library after their last class that day, breaking out their textbooks to get a little bit of studying done for the end of semester exams. However, George's eyes seemed to be a bit more keen on drooping shut than on focusing.

"You don't want to study in the library anymore? I guess it *is* a bit crowded. I suppose we could head to the Courtyard, though it might be too cold..."

"No, George. I mean the investigation. We— you can't do it anymore."

George put down his quill and stared at his friend blankly, "I— *I* can't do this anymore?"

"George, don't play dumb, okay?" Dream huffed. "I'm not blind. I see the way you're chasing Eret

around—”

"I'm not chasing *anyone*."

"Yes, you *are*. You're obviously not getting enough sleep, you keep giving him these weird looks every time he sits with us, and even *weirder* looks when he's not."

"That..." George trailed off. What was he supposed to say?

"It's exactly what we did before, when we were investigating everyone else."

George contemplated the words for a second, before a realization struck him. "Okay, so what if I am?"

"What?"

"So what if I *am* investigating him? Huh? We never officially stopped our *original* investigation. We never found out who the real traitor was, which means there's still some crazy hitman running around our school!"

Dream threw his hands up in exasperation. "George you— what you're doing right now isn't healthy, okay?"

"I think it's pretty healthy to be *alive*—"

"It's not healthy to be suspicious of your friends and to think that they're going to kill you!" Dream cried. "You're *tired*. You've been slacking in class — *oh*, don't give me that look. All the teachers have noticed that you aren't raising your hand as much."

"What I'm doing right now is much more important!"

"No, it's not. It's just making you paranoid."

"That's easy for *you* to say! You're not the one with a name on that list!"

Dream went quiet at that, the silencing stretching on for an uncomfortably long time before he let out a sigh. "Have you even made any big breakthroughs since your birthday?"

"Yes." George nodded in affirmation, "That's why I know it's him for sure, I just need to catch him with something *really* big so I can show it to McGonagall."

Dream lowered his eyes down to the table, his shoulders sagging. "Fine."

George glanced at his friend for another moment, before turning back to his potions textbook.

"Just... promise me something. Okay?"

George turned his eyes back to his friend once more. "What is it?"

"Take care of yourself first. I'll let you do whatever investigation you want. I'll even *help* you with it. Just...take care of yourself for now. Hold it off until the end of winter break, okay?"

"But—!"

"*Please*. For *me*. I can't keep seeing you walk around like some kind of zombie. I want to help you, but you *can't* ruin your life over this."

George pursed his lips. Was Dream *seriously* not getting how dangerous the situation was?

"This investigation has already hurt people, George. And that's the *opposite* of what we want to do," Dream added.

Wilbur's pained expression flashed through his mind at those words.

*George, we all heard you. I— you don't need to try to explain yourself. I'm really sorry.*

George gulped. Dream was right. They were too quick to jump to conclusions before, and obsessing over the list again might make history repeat itself.

Plus, George really *was* tired and slacking off. He was smart enough to recognize that this entire thing was putting him at risk of losing both himself *and* a friend.

He sighed and shut the textbook in front of him. "Okay. I promise."

Dream blew out a long breath and leaned back in his chair. "Thank you," he said. "And I promise that if by the time we get back to Hogwarts after winter break you're *still* sure that it's him, I'll help you investigate."

George smiled at the words. He really *was* lucky to have a friend like Dream.

"Deal."

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The week before the end of term, Dream and George were packing up their bags after another intense Muggle Studies lesson. Just before they were about to exit the room, they noticed Eret lagging behind, shifting anxiously in front of Professor Borealis' desk.

The two best friends exchanged a curious glance, a silent agreement passing between them. As soon as they were outside the room, they scrambled to get out of view of the doorway, tilting their heads in their classmate's direction to better hear the conversation.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Eretson. I've received your owl about the matter you wished to discuss."

Eret nodded, staying silent as he glanced around the classroom nervously.

"You really shouldn't worry about such things," she assured him.

"I-I know," Eret stammered. "I just can't help but feel anxious. It's been really hard, trying to relate to them and everything..."

"Intermarriage is as common as the mumblemumps, my dear boy. Your cousin isn't the first to fall in love with a Muggle, nor will she be the last," Borealis said calmly. "And as for relating to them: that's what I'm here for. I'm glad you felt comfortable approaching me with this matter."

"Yeah," Eret sighed, voice breaking. "I just want to be able to protect them. They keep talking about how I'm a 'super cool wizard', and I don't want to let them down so..." He gulped, "I-I've been spending a lot of time in the library, studying protection spells and other higher level charms, but I guess I also want to be able to see things from their perspective."

George peaked around the doorway and saw Professor Borealis smiling gently. "My advice to you is to trust your cousin and focus on your upcoming examinations. You have enough on your plate already, Alastair."

Eret nodded, still seeming like he had something to say. He opened his mouth, but hardly any sound came out.

"Something is troubling you," Borealis sensed.

"Y-yes I... I was just wondering how—" he paused, "How would one go about.... w-when it comes to addressing prejudice—"

Borealis's eyes widened. "Mr. Eretson, if your family is not supportive of your cousin's—"

"No! No, it's nothing like that!" Eret cried, waving his arms around to dismiss the idea, "They're *very* supportive. Almost *too* supportive. They're basically obsessed with all things Muggle right now. I think they even got jealous when they heard that I would be taking your class this year."

Borealis chuckled, relaxing at the words. "So, then, what exactly *is* the issue if not familial prejudice against Muggles?"

"Well..." Eret trailed off, "I think, since Muggles face *a lot* of prejudice, you would know how to talk about it, right? So...if it was prejudice against a different group of people who also couldn't control their circumstances, how could I explain to them that it's..."

"Wrong?" she finished his sentence.

Eret nodded, "I...I have friends here who my parents weren't too happy about. I thought they were right about them for a long time too, but...there's no excuse for judging someone based on something they can't control. I realize that now."

"So that's what you should tell them," Borealis replied. "I'm not too sure what kind of prejudice you might be referring to, but you explained it very well to me just now. And if they're supportive of Muggles, you can use that as a comparison."

Dream reached out and tapped George on the shoulder, motioning for them to leave. George nodded; he didn't feel comfortable listening in on this conversation anymore. The two quietly slinked away from the doorway and made their way towards the Great Hall.

"So..." Dream began, taking slow steps to their destination.

"So," George echoed.

"Looks like Eret had a lot on his plate this year."

"Yeah..." he trailed off, feeling a lump of guilt building up in his throat.

Dream put a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Hey, you didn't know about it. It's okay—"

"It's *not*, though. This whole time Eret's been trying to bond with his new Muggle relatives while I've been accusing him of being a racist terrorist," George retorted. "And don't act like we don't know what that *second* bit was all about. He's been trying to learn a whole new culture while *also* getting over his own House bias. That's, like, being *doubly* not racist. He's the most unracist person in the world."

Dream considered his words for a moment. "Yeah, I-I guess he is. It takes a lot of guts to be able to stand up to your family about this kinda stuff. They always think their awful opinions are right."

George nodded, feeling worse by the second. "I'm really glad you stopped me from this whole

investigation thing. If I'd've falsely accused *another* one of my friends, I wouldn't've been able to live with myself."

Dream suddenly paused in his steps and rummaged through his pocket for a moment before pulling out a crumpled piece of parchment.

George gulped. He knew what that paper was.

"Will you do the honors?" Dream asked, handing it over to him.

George reached out and crumpled up their suspect list. As he did so, he realized that he'd never been happier to throw out a piece of paper in his entire life.

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The cozy warmth of the Hogwarts Express was a welcome escape from the biting winter chill.

Inside the compartment, George took his favorite seat by the window. Dream soon sat down beside him as Sapnap claimed the spot directly across from him. Wilbur, Eret, Schlatt, and even Minx soon squeezed in as well, making for a tight yet not unpleasant fit.

As the train began to move, Wilbur let out a wistful sigh.

"I sure will miss the castle," the curly haired boy remarked, gaze fixed on the passing Scottish hillside outside the window.

"You're *such* a Ravenclaw," Sapnap teased. "The holidays *just* started and you already miss school."

"It's not *just* about missing school, it's about feeling homesick. Doesn't Hogwarts feel like home to you now?"

"Nah. I don't have tests at home. Those end of semester exams *killed* me, dude."

George snorted. "You mean your *first-year* assessments, Sapnap? Was *Wingardium Leviosa* really that hard to perform?"

"*Hey*. It was hard for you, too, once."

"Yeah, George, you really shouldn't be talking," Dream chimed in. "Didn't it take you, like, three weeks to figure out *Alohomora*?"

George blushed and crossed his arms. "I don't know what you're talking about."

The rest of the ride into London passed in a similar vein, with the second-years laughing and bantering and generally having a good time. After about an hour, the steady rhythm of the train coupled with the soothing sounds of his friends' conversations lulled George into a pleasant sleep.

When, several hours later, George woke up and glimpsed the smiling faces of his waiting parents through his compartment window, he was too happy to be embarrassed about the fact that he'd woken up with his head on Dream's shoulder.

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George awoke on Christmas morning to the sound of a thump on his bedroom window.

Stifling a yawn with his hand, he sat up in his bed and blearily rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. A glance at the clock on his bedside table told him it wasn't even eight in the morning. Curious about the sound, George slowly got to his feet, padded over to his bedroom window, and opened it...

...only to be hit squarely in the face with an incoming snowball.

"Wh—?" George spluttered, scrambling to wipe the cold snow off his face. Annoyance bubbled in his chest; he *knew* without even looking who was to blame for this rude awakening.

His suspicions were confirmed moments later when he heard a tell-tale wheeze from outside.

"Merry Christmas, Georgie!" a voice yelled up at him. Groaning, George poked his head out the window and glared down at his grinning best friend.

"What's *wrong* with you?" he demanded, noticing a second snowball in his friend's hand. "Dream, I swear, if you throw that thing at me I will burn your Christmas present."

Dream gasped theatrically and hastily discarded the snowball. "You *wouldn't*."

"Don't test me. Why are you awake this early, anyway? It isn't even *eight*."

Dream pouted and looked up at George with his best puppy dog eyes. Despite his lingering annoyance over Dream's actions, George found himself smiling at his best friend's antics.

"I wanted to give you your present! *Pwease*, Gogi, pwease come outside?" Dream pleaded, pulling a wrapped box out from behind his back.

George huffed and rolled his eyes, "I'm coming out from the front." He declared, closing his bedroom window before Dream could call him anymore embarrassing nicknames. He threw a jumper on over his pajamas and padded down the stairs into his living room. His father was already awake and sipping a cup of coffee by the fireplace by the time George came downstairs.

"Going out already, George?" his dad asked, nodding at the winter coat George held in his hands.

"Yes. Is that alright?"

His dad smiled and tilted his head. "Is it that boy next door? The one who goes to your school?"

George blushed and nodded sheepishly. "I won't be long, though, so you can tell Mum I'll be back in time to help her with breakfast."

His dad waved a hand dismissively and shooed him out the door. "Don't worry about it. Go have fun. Oh, and wish your friend a Merry Christmas from me!"

With that, George shoved his feet into his snow boots and stepped out into his snowy front yard. Dream was already waiting for him on the stairs, foot bouncing up and down impatiently.

"There you are!" he exclaimed upon hearing the door open and leaped to his feet. "Took you long enough."

"I literally *just* woke up!"

Dream smirked, "Yeah, yeah, excuses, excuses."

"You're *so* annoying."

"Whatever, c'mon, we gotta go to our spot!"

"Wh— what do you mean, 'our spot?' It's freezing out here! Can't we just exchange gifts now?"

"Nope! Everything important happens at our tree stump, George, we can't break tradition!" He grabbed George by the wrist and began pulling him away from the door.

"Yes we can! See? Right now! Just give me my gift and I'll give you yours and we'll break tradition!"

Dream tsked, "Nope! I didn't sneak out of the house just to do a boring gift exchange at your front door."

George groaned, allowing himself to be tugged towards their clearing in the park. If Dream really *did* have to Mission Impossible his way out of the house, he may as well humor him on this.

When they made it to their little clearing, Dream shoved the box into George's hands. "Alright, open your darn present, already."

George huffed and proceeded to peel the edges of the wrapping paper off bit by bit. Predictably, this frustrated Dream to no end.

"Oh my *god*, George, just tear it off!"

"No," the shorter boy said stubbornly.

"If you don't open the box within the next three seconds I will tear it open for you."

George rolled his eyes at his friend's impatience and hastily pried the top of the box off, squinting inside to examine his present.

"You got me...glasses? Thanks, but...I don't wear glasses, Dream."

When George looked up at his friend, he noted the mischievous glint in the other boy's eye.

"Just put them on. You can see me through them first. Oh!" Dream gasped, smiling as something occurred to him. "I'll be the first thing you really see!"

George was properly confused, but he nonetheless picked up the white glasses and put them on.

And, for the first time in his life, George saw the world in full color.

He looked up at his friend in wonder, gasping when his eyes took in the sight of Dream standing before him. The blond boy looked all at once the same and completely different. His cheeks became fuller, tinted a hue he couldn't name. Dream's eyes, shining with excitement, had also taken on a new vibrance.

"Your eyes," George said breathlessly. "They're..."

"Green, George! They're green! Can you see them?"

"I..." George trailed off, rendered speechless by just how *vivid* everything looked. The winter sun was just beginning to rise in the sky, setting the world ablaze with colors George could only think to describe as *warm*. The snow around their feet was cast in a soft glow, and George couldn't resist the temptation to reach down and touch it with his fingers to see if it felt any different.

“Are you okay, George?” Dream asked humorously, amused by his friend’s reactions.

“Do...do you see like this all the time?” George finally asked in a voice saturated with wonder.

“Yep! I figured you might like to see a real sunrise.”

Suddenly overcome with emotion, George leapt forward and enveloped Dream in a hug. The taller boy stumbled back, surprised at first, but soon returned the gesture with a chuckle.

“*Thank you* , Dream. This is the best gift ever,” the shorter boy said into his friend’s shoulder.

“Aww, you’re welcome. I asked Madame Abbott and Professor Flitwick to help me get the color correction charm right, so I’m glad you like it.”

“I *love* it. I’m never taking these off. Like, *ever*.”

The boys separated, then, and Dream raised an eyebrow.

“Are you *sure* about that? Those white goggles are kinda goofy-looking.”

In lieu of a reply, George thrust a small gift box into his friend’s hands. Dream let out an excited gasp and immediately tore open the wrapping paper.

“Now, it’s nowhere near as good as the gift *you* gave me, but—”

“You got me a *doll*?!” Dream interrupted, holding his gift up to his face. It *was* a sort of doll, white and soft to the touch. It had neither arms nor legs, but it *did* have a very derpy smile stitched onto its face.

“Well, let me explain—”

Suddenly, Dream gave the doll a squeeze. Immediately, a familiar voice echoed throughout the clearing.

“*Oh, Geo-ORGE!*” the doll called out in Dream’s own voice.

“...WHAT?! George, what was *that*?”

“I charmed it to sound like you. When you squeeze it, it says something you would say. I originally wanted to make the doll look like you as well, but...” George shrugged sheepishly, “well, I’m rubbish at arts and crafts, so it came out like that instead.”

Dream gave the doll another forceful squeeze. A deafening wheeze sounded around them, making Dream grin like the cat that ate the canary.

“...what have I done?” George groaned.

In response, Dream squeezed the doll again.

“*I’m gonna pee myself!* ”

“Dream, *stop it!* ”

~~~~~

Though the two best friends had to part shortly after sunrise, Dream was able to meet up with George again after dinner. The two boys were attempting to build a snow fort in their clearing when Dream pelted a snowball at George's face.

"*Dream!*" George exclaimed angrily.

"Ha! You should see your face!"

"I *hate* you."

"No, you don't. You love me."

"Well I *hate* your stupid ways!"

Dream chuckled. "If you hate my stupid ways so much, you can always find another best friend."

George couldn't help but pause at the words. They sounded eerily similar to something Eret had said to Schlatt at the Ravenclaw table over lunch, back when George was still keeping track of his roommate's every move.

Remembering their failed little investigation made a familiar fear creep up George's spine. His shoulders sagged.

"It still scares me, you know," he suddenly blurted out in a voice barely above a whisper.

Dream put down the block of snow he'd been holding, the smile disappearing from his face in an instant. Of course he knew *exactly* what George was talking about without him even having to say it.

"It shouldn't," the blond said, finally.

"How couldn't it?" George countered. "I— I don't want to be afraid of my friends, Dream. I care about all of them. A lot. Nothing in the entire *world* is worth hurting them. But that doesn't change the fact that someone is *still* out there, after me."

Dream looked away, seemingly thinking about something. When he finally looked back up at George, his face was fixed in a determined expression.

"It's pretty obvious that my dad is a huge part of this whole thing," he said, cringing at his own words. "I'll tell you what: I have one possible test I can run that shouldn't outright let him know that we're onto him. If whatever I find out reveals nothing, you have to *promise* me you're going to drop this thing forever. Okay?"

George paused, then nodded.

"Good. In fact, I'll head home and do it right now," he said, standing to his feet and tucking his hands into his coat pockets.

"Wait—I'm sorry, Dream. I shouldn't have brought it up on Christmas," George said guiltily.

Dream smiled and shook his head. "It's alright, George. Putting you at ease will be your second Christmas present, alright?"

With that, Dream turned and walked in the direction of his house. George couldn't help but smile gratefully at the receding figure of his best friend as he disappeared into the trees.

The way back home wasn't exactly easy for the Slytherin. He had to tiptoe around the back of George's driveway and duck behind trees to stay out of sight, but eventually he managed to sneak all the way up to his own fence.

With one final glance over his shoulder, Dream threw himself over the fence and into the bushes of his backyard. Once on the other side, he paused, listening for footsteps. Thankfully, he was met only with the disgruntled sounds of grumpy garden gnomes.

Satisfied no one was watching, Dream quickly reached down, picked up a pebble off the ground, and threw it at his bedroom window.

A few moments passed with no response, but eventually the window swung open and a chain of tied-together bedsheets was tossed through it and lowered gently to the ground. Dream grabbed hold of the chain and began to climb, while the person on the other side tugged him up at the same time.

Once he successfully made it through his window, he collapsed onto his bedroom floor with a grunt. A figure closed the window for him before taking a seat on the edge of the bed and giving the blond a look.

"Good grief, Dream," the person said, rotating an arm stiffly. "Maybe lose a few pounds if you're gonna keep doing this, eh? This whole routine feels like a goddamn workout."

"Listen, I had to cut my meeting short today," Dream began, shrugging off his coat.

"Aw yeah? What for? Didja get tired of Davidson already, or did you just miss me too much?"

"Stop. This is serious, okay?"

His roommate paused, seemingly caught off guard by the serious tone. "Oh, alright then, let's hear it."

Dream sighed, placing his gloves on his nightstand before turning back to the other person. "I..." He gulped, hesitating. The action was enough for the curious expression on the other person's face to morph into one of disbelief.

"Dream, don't you dare," he warned. "You promised you wouldn't use it against me."

"I'm sorry, but I have to. I-I promised George."

"Well, what the hell didja promise him that you need to do this *now*?!"

"I— I need you to—"

"What the hell, Dream? Why is your promise to him more important than your promise to *me*?!"

"Schlatt," Dream said, looking his friend squarely in the eyes, mouth opening to say the words. "Tell me the truth."

## Chapter End Notes

According to AO3 statistics, only a small percentage of readers actually leave kudos. If

you enjoyed this update, please consider leaving kudos and a comment. It's free, anonymous, and it lets us know we should write more!

Go yell at me (KangarooKen) on Tumblr: [kangarooken.tumblr.com](http://kangarooken.tumblr.com)

Go read Gra55's PJO AU while you wait for the next magical chapter!

## Chapter Thirteen || Year Two

### Chapter Summary

Dream has a few questions for Schlatt.

### Chapter Notes

This was supposed to be a short chapter, but then Gra55 happened (again) and it's 7.5K. I swear it's like Christmas morning every time I wake up and check the Google doc. Anyway, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream dreaded the breaks.

There were far too many, in his opinion. Why did Hogwarts students need time off for Christmas *and* Easter? Though he personally didn't care much for studying, given the choice between sitting with George in the stuffy Hogwarts library and arguing with his dad all day long, he'd choose the library in a heartbeat.

*At least I get to see Drista again. She'll probably be so excited to see me,* he thought. *At least I won't be all alone.*

When the Hogwarts Express pulled into the station, Dream gave George's leg a gentle poke to wake the other boy from his nap. The Ravenclaw's brown eyes blinked open, and in that moment Dream was very tempted to make some sort of teasing comment about how George slept with his mouth open, but there was something about the look of pure joy that flashed across his friend's face when he spotted his parents out the window that made the words catch in Dream's throat.

Instead, Dream watched George sprint out of the compartment with only a hurried goodbye aimed in his direction.

Their other friends soon followed suit, breaking off from the group to embrace waiting family members on the platform. Wilbur's father bent down to ruffle his son's hair. Sapnap's dad looked overjoyed to see the first-year again. Then there was George's dad, who looked so *proud* of the Ravenclaw boy that it made Dream want to cry.

Bitter jealousy swirled in the pit of Dream's stomach at the sight.

A grunt sounded from behind him, breaking him out of his ugly thoughts. This was followed by the thump of something heavy dropping to the ground.

"God, what am I, your little manservant? Come getchure own bags, Dream-boat. These suckers are heavy!"

"You could've just waited for me to get my own things, Schlatt," Dream snickered, rolling his



eyes.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever. The train’s gotta get outta here soon, you know. It’s not just gonna wait for *Mr. Staring-Off-Wistfully-into-the-Sunset* to get himself together and grab his things. This whole break better not just turn into me doin a buncha heavy lifting.”

“Oh, shut it. You just want an excuse to complain about something.”

“N—” Schlatt paused, the retort caught in his throat. He glared at Dream for a moment before sighing, “Ah, you know I can’t lie to you, buddy.”

Dream’s shoulders slumped. Yes, he *did* know.

It had started the summer right before second year. Schlatt said it was some weird family curse; a *blood malediction*, Selwyn Sr. had told him afterwards. Dream’s fellow Slytherin had travelled from healer to healer in search of a cure, but, evidently, the search had been unsuccessful.

Schlatt couldn’t lie to Dream. That much Dream knew, despite the fact that he didn’t know much else about the other boy’s predicament.

The only reason he knew anything at *all* was because of his dad’s involvement in the whole thing. From what Dream could gather, Selwyn Sr. owed some sort of debt to the Slytherin Head of House. Why else would he agree to take in *another* kid when he could barely stand the ones he had already?

As the two boys waited on the platform, Dream felt a pang of pity for his friend. Sure, Dream’s dad was awful, but at least Dream *had* a home.

At least Dream’s parents hadn’t disowned him for being sorted into the wrong Hogwarts House.

A question occurred to Dream, then, as he contemplated his friend’s circumstances.

“Hey, Schlatt?” Dream asked, successfully getting his friend’s attention.

“Hmm?”

“I was just wondering,” the blond began casually, hoping the question wouldn’t come off the wrong way. “Why did you go to Slughorn? You know, after...”

Schlatt’s expression darkened, lips curling into a wry smile. “After my parents went batshit over their only son becoming a snake?”

Dream grimaced and nodded. “Well...yeah. After that.”

Schlatt sighed, combing a hand through his messy brown hair before shrugging. “Well I had to tell *someone*, didn’t I? Lemme ask *you* a question, how bout that? Which adults would *you* go to at our lovely school if your parents disowned you, huh? Because lemme tell you if we had to take a quiz on what adults are dependable in that place, I’d just turn it in blank.”

Dream went quiet at that, understanding Schlatt’s point. Sure, there was McGonagall, but she wasn’t the most... *approachable*. Longbottom, Borealis and Aurora were alright, but Schlatt wasn’t exactly their favorite student.

“Exactly,” Schlatt concluded with a nod, taking the silence as an answer. “With the man’s whole ‘Slug Club’ thing, he’d hafta know *someone* that’d let me crash at their place. And wouldn’t ya

know it! I was right.”

Dream snorted. “Too bad it had to be the Selwyn household.”

“Eh,” Schlatt shrugged. “There’s worse places in the world. It *is* pretty funny that I’m livin’ with a family I’m cursed not to lie to but *c é le ry* or whatever it is the French say.”

Dream winced at that. Funny sure was *one* way to put it. Cruel seemed more apt, in his opinion.

At least Selwyn Sr. had felt somewhat responsible for Schlatt’s affliction. He probably wouldn’t have volunteered to accompany the boy to all of those healers last summer, otherwise.

On the one hand, Dream pitied Schlatt for having to spend any amount of time with his father. On the other hand, his father’s absence had allowed Dream to spend as much time with George as he’d wanted, so Dream didn’t feel *too* bad about the whole thing.

Needless to say, both boys had been *thrilled* to be returning to Hogwarts by the time fall had rolled around.

“Man, do you know how much of a pain in my ass this stupid curse has been?!” Schlatt grumbled. “Apparently, *sarcasm* counts as lying now. I had to scrap so many jokes whenever you reared your head into the place!”

“I’m sure that’s definitely the worst thing this curse has done for you, Schlatt,” Dream chuckled.

“Oh shut it, Dreamy, you don’t even know the half of it. I don’t even wanna talk about all the assignments I couldn’t lie about forgetting in the dorms. And you’d always just be sitting *right there*, laughin at me like it’s not your fault!”

“Wh—!”

“And don’t get me *started* on calling people names! Whenever you’re around, I can’t even call someone a bastard unless they are a *literal* bastard!”

“How does it let you get away with calling Minx every name in the zoo, then?”

Schlatt’s smile wavered at the corners for a second at the mention of the other Slytherin’s name.

“Nicknames don’t count, I guess. Speaking of, we never talked about that stunt you pulled during lunch that one time.”

Dream cringed as he remembered the strange incident. “You’re talking about the whole ‘tell the truth’?”

“*Woah!* Hey! Stop that!” Schlatt cried, cutting Dream off frantically. “You promised you wouldn’t exploit my curse, remember? You can’t just go around sayin those words, man! What if you accidentally make me spew all my dirty dark secrets?”

Dream nodded sheepishly, muttering an apology under his breath. In a way, Schlatt’s curse was the Selwyn family’s fault; the *least* Dream could do was respect the other boy’s ground rules.

“Oh, there he is!” Schlatt exclaimed, pointing at someone over Dream’s shoulder and pulling the other boy out of his thoughts. “Your pops is here, Dream-boat!”

Dream turned around with a grimace as his father approached with a house elf following closely at his heels.

"Hello, boys," Selwyn Sr. greeted them neutrally.

"Heya, Mr. Selwyn!" Schlatt grinned, waving at Dream's dad. "Sorry I'm intruding on your home again this season."

The house elf waddled over to the boys' bags and grabbed hold of one that looked far too heavy for the small creature to handle. Once it had a grip on each trunk, the elf apparated away with a barely audible *pop*.

Selwyn took a step forward to place a hand on Schlatt's shoulder. "One must not apologize for things out of his control," he stated, eyes trained on Schlatt's. "A Slytherin will always be welcome in my home, even if he is unwelcome in his own. Do I make myself clear?"

Schlatt nodded seriously, signalling he understood.

"Good. Do not let me hear you apologizing for any sort of 'intrusion' in my home ever again. To do so would imply that I am not welcoming you into it with open arms."

"Y-you got it, boss." Schlatt saluted.

Selwyn smiled at the boy's gesture. "Very good. It's nice to see that *somebody* here respects my authority." The man glanced at Dream, who simply scoffed and rolled his eyes.

"Aha, yeah, no problem, Sir," Schlatt chuckled nervously, trying to diffuse the situation. "It's, uh—it's a big change from last year, for me! Yeah, last year was just me n' Minx and a coupla others in the common room all winter break. You know Minx, right, Sir?"

"I'm...familiar with the family, yes," Selwyn replied absently.

"Yeah, she's somethin'. I feel kinda bad leavin' her alone this year, but I...I'm really grateful for you and your family, Sir. It's nice—havina place to go."

Dream felt the slimy grip of guilt claw at his throat. Once again, he felt like a jerk for throwing himself a little pity party while Schlatt was literally *homeless*.

He felt bad for not telling George to invite Schlatt and Minx to the Ravenclaw table sooner. That was what a *good* roommate would've done.

"And you shall continue to have a place to go," Selwyn assured Schlatt. "As long as you need it, my home will be open to you."

Dream nodded, determined to make the best of the situation for Schlatt's sake. "I-I don't know how great it's gonna be having to share a room with a guy you can't lie to *year round* now instead of just during the school year," he added, "But I've always said my room was too big, anyway. It'll definitely feel a lot less empty with you around."

"In fact, if anyone should be apologizing, it is I," Dream's dad cut in before Schlatt could even respond to Dream's comment, "For being unable to provide you with separate accommodations. I'm aware that my son isn't always...the *easiest* to get along with."

Dream forced himself not to roll his eyes again. Of course his dad couldn't just let Dream have a pleasant moment for once.

Schlatt glanced between the two Selwyns with watery eyes. "A-aw geez, you guys're-you're gonna make me tear up here, I ca—I don't wanna be doin' that now."

"If it cannot be helped, then do what you must," Selwyn sighed, conjuring a handkerchief with a wave of his wand.

Schlatt sniffled and tucked the kerchief into his robe pocket. "N-naw. I gotta— I'm gonna hold it back. I don't wanna be all lame now."

Selwyn gave the boy one final appraising look before the house elf apparated back onto the platform, holding its hands out to the two Slytherin boys.

"Very well, then. I trust that you can handle yourselves with the elf?" He asked.

"Yessir," Schlatt nodded. Dream just huffed and took the house elf's hand.

"Good."

And with that, Dream screwed his eyes shut and held his breath while the world turned inside out.

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Dream hadn't been lying when he'd said his room was big. When his family had first arrived in the UK, nine-year-old Dream used to chase Drista around it in big circles until the toddler would collapse to the floor in a heap of exhausted giggles. Having his baby sister in his large bedroom had made it seem far less imposing and scary. His dad had refused to even entertain the idea of them sharing a room, however.

You're almost ten, Clay, Selwyn had said to him disapprovingly. *I won't have my heir sharing his bedroom with a baby. It would be beyond improper.*

"Is that a pink Hippogriff plushie?" Schlatt snorted, pointing to a toy in the middle of the carpet once the boys materialized in Dream's room. "Didn't know you were one for stuffed animals, Dreamy."

Dream rolled his eyes. *Of course* Drista hadn't listened to him when he told her not to go into his room while he was at Hogwarts. Everywhere Dream looked, he saw evidence of the four-year-old's presence. He groaned when he saw that Drista had been playing with the LEGO set George had given him for his tenth birthday.

"Bippy," Dream called out, summoning the elf to his side.

"Yes, Master Clay?"

"Take Drista's stuff out of my room before I *Incendio* all of it into a pile of ash," Dream commanded through gritted teeth.

"Yes, Master Clay! Bippy will move Miss Drista's possessions right away, Master Clay!"

While the elf moved his sister's belongings, Schlatt leaned in and asked Dream in a stage whisper, "Does Bippy know that *Master Clay* can't actually do magic outside of school until he's seventeen?"

Dream elbowed Schlatt in the side. "I live in a house with two magical parents. The Ministry wouldn't be able to trace me."

“Whatever you say,” Schlatt snickered, walking over to his trunk and unlatching it. Bippy had prepared a spare bed for Schlatt on the other side of the room, identical to Dream’s own setup. With two bedside tables, an extra set of blankets, and an extra set of drawers for Schlatt to use for the duration of his stay. The drawers even had some of his things left over from Summer, when he last stayed over, but it was all folded neatly away instead of thrown inside haphazardly the way he left it.

“The service in this place is really something,” Schlatt commented as he admired his living situation.

“Yeah, it’s not bad when that elf actually does what it’s *supposed* to do. Just be warned that Drista will definitely put her grubby little hands on your stuff if you leave it out.”

“Where *is* the kid, anyway?” Schlatt asked.

Dream shrugged. “Downstairs, probably. Hold on — *DRISTA!* ”

Almost immediately, an excited squeal sounded from somewhere else in the house.

“DWEAM!” an answering voice called out.

“*KIDS! NO SCREAMING!*”

“SORRY, MOM!”

Suddenly, Bippy appeared in the doorway with a tell-tale *pop*. The house-elf carried a very pleased looking Drista in its arms.

Dream rolled his eyes. “Are you *seriously* too lazy to take the stairs?”

The little girl merely giggled. “I like appawating!”

“Of *course* you do, you weirdo,” Dream said sarcastically, turning to wave Bippy away dismissively. “You can go back downstairs, Bippy.”

Once the elf was gone, Drista tackled Dream in a hug.

“Oof—! *Careful!* You’re big enough that that actually hurt a bit!”

Schlatt eyed the siblings with a smile. “Hey, Drista,” he said, “I know I’m no Dream-boat, but I’m here too, ya know?”

Drista immediately turned around and gasped when she saw the other boy, apparently only just noticing his presence.

“SCHLATT!” she squealed, nearly tripping over herself in her excitement to greet the guest.

“Hey, kiddo!” Schlatt said fondly as he returned the little girl’s hug. “Haven’t seen ya since the summer. You look taller!”

“Yes! I am!” Drista nodded excitedly. “My birthday’s in...um...”

“April?” Dream said, suppressing a snort.

“Yes! Apwil! I’m gonna be *five!* ”

“Wow!” Schlatt exclaimed. “That’s pretty old, kid.”

“I *know*! When I got four, Daddy gave me a bwoomstick! Wanna see?”

Schlatt shot Dream a curious glance. “You’re telling me this kid already has a broom? Dreamy, I’m thirteen and even *I* don’t have my own broom.”

“It’s not a *real* broom, you idiot. It’s just a toy.”

“It *is* weal!” Drista insisted, stomping her foot for emphasis. “BIPPY! BWING ME MY BWOOM!”

The house-elf materialized seconds later with a tiny toy broomstick in its hand. It handed the toy to Drista and promptly disappeared again.

Drista displayed her miniature broomstick to Schlatt proudly. “See? It’s *pink*!”

“Yeah, I *do* see that. Does it work?”

“Yes! Look, Schlatt, look!”

Drista proceeded to mount the little broom, which hovered magically two feet above the ground.

“I’m fwying!” Drista exclaimed happily.

“No, you’re not. You don’t even need *magic* to use that thing. It’s just got a levitation charm on it.”

“Aw c’mon, Dream-boat, be nice, wontcha? The kid’s *flying*, alright? And you know I can’t lie, so it’s true.” Schlatt said in the little girl’s defense.

“Yeah!” Drista cried, “Schlatt *always* tells the truth! He’s not a *weenie* like you!”

Dream stuck his tongue out at her, and she blew a raspberry in return.

“Why dontcha humor her, huh? Is it cuz you’re jealous you didn’t make the quidditch team?”

Dream shot his roommate a glare as Drista tumbled off her broom in a fit of giggles.

“*No.*” Dream huffed.

“Are you sure about that? Lying isn’t cool, Dream.”

“Okay, *whatever*.” He grumbled, before turning back to his sister. “Drista, I want to talk to Schlatt now, alright? *Alone*. Why don’t you go downstairs and bother Mom or something.”

Drista pouted and began to protest. “No fair! I want—”

“Just give us a few minutes, kid,” Schlatt cut in. “I promise I’ll play with you after Dream and I are done talking.”

Annoyed but seemingly satisfied with Schlatt’s promise, Drista turned around and stomped out of her brother’s room, forgetting her toy broomstick on his floor in the process. *Of course.*

“You know, you don’t *have* to be nice to her all the time,” Dream huffed.

“Well I *am* kinda sleepin in her house—”

“You’re sleeping in *my* house too. Does that mean you’re gonna be nice to *me* all the time?” Dream cut in.

“Nah, I have to deal with you year-round. You don’t get any special treatment.”

“Wow. Way to show favoritism. Who are you, my parents?” Dream rolled his eyes.

Schlatt paused at that, but quickly recovered with a retort of his own. “Don’t pull the ‘*my parents*’ card on me, Dream-boat, I have you beat,” he warned. “Are ya *tryin* to get embarrassed, here?”

Dream muttered something incomprehensible under his breath. Schlatt *did* have a point, there.

Dream hated when other people were right.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. Now, did you kick Drista outta here because you *actually* had somethin to say, or can I go and hang out with her?”

“You’d rather hang out with a *four-year-old* than with me?” Dream snickered.

Schlatt blew a breath out of his mouth, avoiding Dream’s eyes. “Listen, man, don’t make me say it out loud. Some things are better left unspoken.”

“Oh come *on*,” Dream scoffed, waiting for an actual answer. When none came, he sighed.

“Whatever. I actually *did* have something I wanted to talk about. You can go play with your friend after we’re done.”

“Alright, out with it then. Preferably *before* her bedtime.”

Dream rolled his eyes, walking over to the window in between their beds and throwing it open. In an instant, a blast of sharp winter wind whipped past his head, its coldness eliciting a shiver from him and biting at his exposed limbs. Once the initial shock of the chill had passed, Dream poked his head out of the open window and considered the distance between him and the backyard floor.

“*Dream!* I’m gonna — I *might* freeze my ass off if you don’t close that goddamn window!”

“I need a way to sneak out,” Dream said, ignoring Schlatt’s comment.

“Cool. Actually, *cold*. Very cold. Can we plan your prison break in a room with a closed window?”

“My dad’s not gonna let me out on Christmas, and I have to meet up with George. I spent *months* figuring out what to get him for his Christmas present, and I’m *not* letting it go to waste,” Dream continued.

“Of course you don’t have to let anything go to waste, buddy. Let’s close the window though, alright?”

“I can’t ask Bippy to apparate me out. If I do, I’ll get tattled on like last time. And I can’t use a broom, either, since a broom would be too big to fit out of a window and would attract too much attention.”

“Dream, I’m sure a lot of people would find this story *riveting*, alright? But all *I’m* finding is hypothermia in my near future if I stay in the cold for too long.”

“Do you think I could climb the walls of my house?”

“DREAM!” Schlatt yelled. “Listen, man, I have an idea, but if you don’t close the *goddamn* window not only am I not gonna *tell* it to you, but I’ll rat you out to both your parents and you’ll be on house arrest for *Merlin* knows how long!”

The threat finally seemed to get Dream’s attention. The boy reached over and slammed the window shut, locking it into place.

“*Finally*. Man, these robes are *not* built for winter,” Schlatt shivered, rubbing his arms with his hands to generate some sort of heat.

Dream tilted his head at his roommate questioningly. “Why aren’t you wearing your winter robes, then?”

Schlatt shot him an unimpressed look in response. “Didn’t think I was in the presence of *Sherlock Holmes*. Here’s a hint, *detective*: I’m fuckin *homeless*. ”

Dream blinked in surprise, too taken aback by his roommate’s bluntness to even consider asking who the hell Sherlock Holmes was. “Wh— but then what about last year? How— what did you do then?” he stammered.

“Well, I was *plannin* on retrieving my cold weather wardrobe over winter break, so I kinda packed light before I got to school last year,” Schlatt explained. “ What I *hadn’t* planned on, however, was our very own Sorting Hat deciding that I belonged with the snakes. So...yeah. I kinda missed out on my chance to go back home and get that winter gear.”

“So then last year you just, what, froze?”

“Layering does wonders, Dream-boat. Layering and that one scarf Minx got me.” Schlatt sighed. “Do you know how embarrassing it was to not have anything to give her in return? My parents cut me off completely!”

“W— well why didn’t you tell me?! I would’ve let you borrow some of my stuff if I’d known!”

“Oh yeah? How would that conversation’ve gone, huh? Lemme think. ‘Hey, Dream-boat, can I borrow some of your winter robes?’” Schlatt then cleared his throat and raised his voice in a mockery of Dream’s. “‘ *Sure thing, Schlatt! Hey, why do you need my clothes anyways? Don’t you have your own?* ’ ‘Haha! Nope! I’m homeless!’ ‘ *Oh! Well that’s okay! Lots of people are! I won’t even ask you any follow-up questions! Here you go!* ’ Is that how it would’ve gone, Dream?”

“I— I guess not, but you wouldn’t have had to say it like *that*,” Dream huffed.

“Oh c’mon, you know me. Why am I here if not for making inappropriately timed jokes?” Schlatt snickered. “I was okay, though. Hogwarts keeps the dorms nice and warm during the winter, so it wasn’t that bad.”

“Right...” Dream trailed off, considering Schlatt’s words. The conversation suddenly made him realize that he hadn’t gotten Schlatt a Christmas present at all.

That would have to change soon.

“Well, enough about me. Time to talk about your escape plan!” Schlatt clasped his hands, rubbing them together expectantly. “Alright, so here’s how it goes. You know how in the movies when the main character hasta—”

“Schlatt, I hate to remind you, but I’ve never watched a movie in my entire life.”

Schlatt groaned, rolling his eyes. “God, what is the point of Davidson, anyway?! Does he teach you nothing?!”

“Hey! He gave me a camera and I took a bunch of non-moving pictures of my feet! And also *LEGOS*! That’s a *lot*. ”

“No, no, no, just shut up. Forget it. I’m gonna figure out how to get a job, first, and after that I’m treating all of you guys to a movie. I’ll steal one if I have to,” Schlatt declared.

Dream considered this for a moment. Maybe he should get Schlatt a movie for Christmas. He’d have to ask George about the details, but he figured it shouldn’t be *that* hard.

“Forget it. Let’s get back to what I was saying before your *ignorance* distracted me, ” he spat, glaring at his fellow Slytherin. “In movies, whenever the main character has to sneak outta their room without their parents knowing, they tie together a buncha sheets, alright? End to end, and it makes a rope that they can use to climb out their window and get to the ground.”

Dream glanced at Schlatt quizzically. “So... this is a common problem?”

“Probably not, but at least you have a solution now, right?” Schlatt shrugged, “Let’s see if you have enough sheets to pull this thing off.”

Just then, Bippy popped into existence between them, catching them both off guard.

“Master Clay asks that Master Clay and his friend come down for dinner!” the house-elf informed them expectantly, gesturing towards the door of Dream’s room.

“Can’t you just tell him we’re busy now? We’re in the middle of something,” Dream grumbled.

“Master Clay will be very cross with Master Clay if he does not come down immediately!” Bippy squeaked, ears flattening and shoulders sagging.

“Well, ‘Master Clay’ can go f—”

“*Please*, Master Clay! Whatever it is Master Clay and Mister Schlatt need, Bippy will do it for them! Bippy will put Master Clay and his friends’ things away while Master Clay and his friend go eat, Sir!”

Dream opened his mouth to argue with the house-elf again, but Schlatt cut him off.

“Ya know what? That sounds like a good plan. Thanks, Bippy. While you’re at it though, do ya think you can bring us some extra sheets ‘n blankets? You know how it is, winter ‘n all that, layering’s important.”

Bippy nodded fervently. “Yes, Mister Schlatt! Bippy will bring more sheets for you. Bippy will make sure that your room will not be cold, and if Bippy is not successful, Bippy will smash Bippy’s own ears in the cupboard!”

“Uh...you don’t have to do that, Bippy. Extra sheets *do* sound great, though!!” Schlatt grinned, clapping a hand onto Dream’s shoulder and guiding him towards the door. “C’mon, Clay, it’s family dinner time!”

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In the week that followed, Schlatt and Dream practiced the escape plan every single day.

True to its word, the house-elf brought them enough sheets to make a chain long enough to stretch all the way to the ground floor from Dream's bedroom window. The boys used every spare moment they had to practice scaling the walls of the house.

At first, they tried to have Dream climb their makeshift rope on his own. However, they soon discovered that the upper body strength of a twelve year old was not enough to accomplish the task at hand. After many failed attempts, the boys finally managed to solve the problem through a combination of Schlatt tugging on the rope and Dream scaling the wall with his feet.

"Dream-boat, if I wake up tomorrow with sore arms, I might just hafta let you figure out a way to get back in by yourself," Schlatt groaned, flexing his arms painfully.

"Oh, stop complaining. I'm helping you build muscle." Dream rolled his eyes, rubbing at his own sore palms. He hadn't expected the bedsheet rope to be so hard on his hands.

"C'mon. Do I really need *another* reason for Minx to be all over me?" Schlatt snickered. "Picture this: I come into the Slytherin common room first thing after break, all jacked, screaming 'Merry Christmas' and tackling Minx to the ground. Do you think that'll make up for not giving her a gift last year?"

"I think you might not live to see another Christmas if you do that," Dream replied.

"Ha! She doesn't have what it takes to beat this future super jacked version of myself."

"I think it'll take more than two weeks of winter break to get you 'jacked' enough to beat Minx. I swear I heard her rehearsing the Unforgivable Curses under her breath the last time you pissed her off."

Schlatt snickered. "Yeah, I can never tell who's gonna get expelled first: Minx for finally snapping and *Cruciatus*-ing me, or Quackity for screwin around all the time."

"Oh, is screwing around just a Gryffindor first-year thing? Do they all do that?" Dream chuckled, thinking of Sapnap.

Schlatt nodded. "Yup, except mine's not dumb. The kid's a genius, but at this point I'm not sure if he's spent more time with me or with Filch."

"I don't like what you're implying about Sapnap," Dream said, raising his eyebrow at Schlatt.

"If I had any cash, Dream-boat, I'd bet *money* that my first-year could beat up your first-year."

"No, no. We shouldn't make them fight each other." Dream shook his head and bit his lip contemplatively. "Let me know a time and a place, and we'll schedule a playdate for them, instead."

"Dude, they probably sleep in the same goddamn room."

"Oh yeah?" Dream grinned, suddenly remembering something, "I bet *your* first-year would ask *my* first-year for winter robes if he ever became homeless."

“Awww COME ON!” Schlatt cried, punching Dream in the shoulder as the blond was reduced to a fit of wheezing laughter. “What the hell is wrong with you?! Stop laughing! You think this is a joke? You think you’re funny?”

“You can’t even say that it’s *not*!” Dream wheezed.

“It’s—! Oh my *god*. I don’t think it’s—!” Schlatt stammered, struggling to get past his curse. “What the hell?! This isn’t a jo—! *Fuck!*”

Dream’s contagious laughter grew even stronger at that, coughing and wheezing and collapsing to the ground until Schlatt finally gave up and joined in.

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“You owe me *big time* for this, Dream,” Schlatt grumbled, pulling the blanket over his shoulders around him tightly as Dream opened the window and threw their rope chain out of it. “Do you realize how hard it’s gonna be to cover for you all day when I can’t even lie?!”

“I’ll be home soon, don’t worry. You’re smart, you’ll figure it out,” Dream replied absently, tucking his gift to George into his coat.

Schlatt grabbed hold of the other end of the chain, huffing at Dream’s nonchalance. “I’m not stayin up for more than an hour, you hear me? If you come back any later than that, you’re stuck in the backyard until one o’ your parents is up to let you in.”

“Right, right.” Dream nodded, already lifting himself out the window.

"I'm serious! I can't lie to you, Dream. It's gonna happen."

"I believe you!" Dream called up to him, already halfway down to the backyard.

Dream questioned his idea of sneaking out as soon as he had both feet on the snowy ground. Hopefully, his parents wouldn’t notice the huge tracks leading away from his bedroom window.

After double-checking to make sure George’s gift was securely in place, Dream picked up a handful of snow and began the short walk to his best friend’s house. By the time he finally made it close enough to throw the snowball at George’s bedroom window, his fingers were so numb with the cold that he couldn’t feel the digits at all.

After his first snowball received no response, Dream huffed and began making a bigger one. *If this one doesn’t get his attention, maybe I’ll just have to find a rock instead*, he thought.

Luckily for his frozen fingers, George opened his window just as Dream hurled the snowball into the air. The unfortunate timing, however, meant that the snowball pelted the other boy directly in the face, causing him to sputter and trip over himself hilariously.

And, just like that, any regrets Dream had about waking up at the "ass crack of dawn," as Schlatt had put it, dissipated.

Dream had been worried that his gift wouldn’t work. He’d been worried that George would take one look at the dorky white frames and wrinkle his nose up in disgust. A large part of Dream even

worried that George might be insulted by Dream trying to “fix” his vision.

As it turned out, all of Dream’s fears had been for nothing. George *loved* the goggles. The smile that graced his face when he donned them for the first time was proof enough that Dream had chosen the right gift.

That smile, *god*. That smile was worth a thousand numb fingers and runny noses. Dream would suffer severe bedsheet burns on his palms for as long as he lived if it meant that he got to exchange stupid yet heartfelt gifts with his best friend every year.

Dream couldn’t even bring himself to care when Schlatt made fun of the dumb little smiley face plush when he got home, because George’s gift *was* dumb. It was dumb, and Dream loved it anyway.

“You better tuck that thing away if you don’t want Drista touching it,” Schlatt warned when Dream set the little doll on his bedside table.

“Oh, believe me, I know. Finding some sort of little sister repelling charm is at the top of my to-do list.”

Just then, Bippy materialized in his room and requested their presence downstairs for breakfast.

Christmas was never really a huge deal in the Selwyn household. Dream’s parents usually got him and Drista whatever they wanted year round, so the kids didn’t exactly need a special gift-giving day. A seasonal breakfast and little gift exchange by the Christmas tree was just about the extent of their celebration.

Drista was already in the living room when the two Slytherin boys clambered downstairs. Unfortunately for them, Dream’s mom immediately noticed her son’s disheveled appearance and the dark bags under Schlatt’s eyes.

"Goodness, what happened to you two?" Dreams mother asked, frowning at their appearance.
"Clay, what have you done?"

"Wh— I didn't do anything!" Dream cried.

"Dear, what did he do to you?" she asked Schlatt, ignoring her son's protests.

"Ah, Dream opened a window at a time when he *probably* shouldn't have," Schlatt replied, gritting his teeth in a way that meant that Dream double-owed him one.

"*Clay!* It's below freezing outside!"

"I know! I'm sorry, I didn't think it would be that bad," Dream apologized.

"Don't let it happen again or there'll be magical locks on your window soon," his mother warned. Dream gulped, knowing that she'd go through with it if she had to. "Now come unwrap your gifts so we can get you some warm drinks and maybe a Pepperup Potion."

Dream grinned and sat down next to Drista, who was already tearing open a large parcel. Dream reached blindly under the tree and pulled out a green box, making to tear off the wrapping paper, but his mom smacked him on the wrist before he could.

"*Ow!*"

"Merlin, Clay, can't you read? Pay attention before you go tearing away at gifts that aren't yours!" she admonished.

"Wh— this is for *Drista*? I thought you always wrap *my* gifts in green wrapping paper." The name at the corner of the gift caught his eye, then, and Dream gasped. "Schlatt?! It's for you!"

Schlatt, who had previously been shifting uncomfortably in his spot while two siblings tore open their gifts, looked up in shock. "Who, me?"

"No, the *other* Schlatt," Dream said sarcastically, holding the gift out towards his roommate.

"Alright, alright, I— I'll take it, I guess." Schlatt took the box in his hands hesitantly, shooting Mrs. Selwyn a questioning look.

"Well, go on," she urged him. "It has *your* name on it."

Schlatt closed his mouth, nodding. "Fair enough," he said with a shrug, tearing off the wrapping paper in one fluid motion.

Inside the box were three winter robes, folded neatly on top of each other.

"Clothes?" Dream asked, crinkling his nose in distaste.

"*Winter* clothes..." Schlatt trailed off, looking up at Mrs. Selwyn, who was smiling at him. "How'd you know?"

"Oh, Bippy commented that you only had summer robes in your belongings. It simply wouldn't do for a guest of ours to catch a cold over break, now would it?"

"I got a pwesent fo you too!" Drista exclaimed, holding out a very obviously plushie-shaped lump of wrapping paper.

"Aw, Drista, ya didn't—"

"Open!" she commanded, ignoring him and shaking the gift fervently.

He sighed, reaching to take it from her hand when the toy suddenly slipped cleanly out of the wrapping paper. Everyone looked down as one of Drista's favorite baby dolls landed face-up on the floor.

"Oh my god, it's Baby Yuto!" Schlatt gasped.

"Yes!" Drista yelled, throwing the wrapping paper to the side and picking up the doll. "I know he's youw favowite, so he's youws now!"

"Wow. This is— this is really great, thank you," Schlatt sniffled, watching as Drista placed the baby doll into his clothing box. "I— I'm sorry I didn't getcha anything this year, alright?! Next year I'll uh..I'll try to find some sorta job, maybe I—"

"No need," Selwyn cut in smoothly, materializing suddenly out of nowhere. His father had the cleanest apparitions of any wizard Dream had ever seen. "I have decided, Jebediah, that you will receive a weekly allowance for as long as you stay under my roof."

"Wh— no! I can't take— I *won't* take money from you guys! That— you're already lettin me stay here, that's more than enough."

Selwyn waved him off. "I won't hear of it. Call it what you will, a Christmas present, or payment for entertaining my children during your stay, whichever you prefer. A young wizard such as yourself need not concern himself with employment."

"Wait, you're giving Schlatt *babysitter* money as a Christmas present?!" Dream cried.

"Oh, hush, you!" his mother snapped, slapping him on the back of the head.

"Ow!"

"Aw, geez, I really don't know what to say...." Schlatt trailed off, glancing down at the gift pile with a wobbly smile, "I don't wanna get all lame here..."

"You may be excused to put your gifts away," Mrs. Selwyn nodded, waving him off towards the stairs.

As Schlatt's figure retreated back to their room and Dream rubbed the back of his head painfully, Drista giggled. "Youw just jealous he gets mow money dan you!"

"That's not true!"

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Dream didn't know he'd been thinking when he told George he'd run a test for him.

Maybe he hadn't been thinking at all. In that moment, he knew only two things: one, he hated the terrified expression on George's face, and two, he would do everything in his power to never see it again.

Dream needed answers. *Straightforward* answers. No guesses, no vague suspect lists that led nowhere. Just answers. And as much as Dream hated the thought of what he was about to do, he knew there was only one person who was *guaranteed* to give him those answers.

If Schlatt knew *anything* about the strange Muggle-born attacks, Dream would soon know it, too.

*He's gonna hate you*, a part of his brain told him.

*He'll understand*, the other part of his brain shot back. *There are real lives at stake*.

The climb up to his bedroom window that night was awful, his guilt weighing him down more than his body ever could.

"Good grief, Dream," Schlatt huffed, rotating his arm stiffly after he shut the window and plopped down onto his bed. "Maybe lose a few pounds if you're gonna keep doing this, eh? This whole routine feels like a goddamn workout."

Dream gulped, averting his eyes and shrugging off his coat. "Listen, I had to cut my meeting short today."

"Aw yeah? What for? Didja get tired of Davidson already, or did you just miss me too much?"

*Please don't joke, Schlatt*, he pleaded internally. *You're just gonna make it worse*.

"Stop. This is serious, okay?" Dream said, finally meeting his roommates' eyes.

Schlatt paused, lowering his arms slowly, the serious tone catching him off guard. "Oh, alright then, let's hear it."

Dream sighed, turning away for a moment to place his gloves on his nightstand.

*Just say it. Schlatt will understand eventually. You need answers.*

"I..." He gulped, hesitating. The action was enough for the curious expression on Schlatt's face to morph into one of disbelief, because *of course* the other boy could guess where this was going.

"Dream, don't you dare," he warned. "You promised you wouldn't use it against me."

"I'm sorry, but I have to. I-I promised George."

"Well, what the hell didja promise him that you need to do this *now*?!" Schlatt yelled, standing up from the bed.

"I— I need you to—"

"What the hell, Dream!? Why is your promise to him more important than your promise to *me*?!"

"Schlatt," Dream said firmly, looking at his friend squarely in the eyes, mouth opening to say the words. "Tell me the truth."

In an instant, the incredulous, indignant look on his friend's face melted away, turning into one of...disappointment? Sadness? Dream couldn't really tell, but, then again, he didn't really want to know.

Dream took a deep breath before asking the first question on his mind. "Tell me the truth. Back in our first year, did you tell anyone about the duel between me and Techno?"

"No." Schlatt answered immediately.

Dream narrowed his eyes and decided to rephrase. "Fine, then. Did you, in any way, let anyone know about the duel between me and Techno?"

"I—" Schlatt's voice cracked, but he was unable to tear his eyes away from Dream's gaze. "I did."

Immediately, Dream tensed, dread pooling in his gut. "What?!" he cried, grabbing Schlatt by the shoulders, "I-I thought— you *told* me before that you didn't tell anyone!"

"I didn't tell anyone *directly*, not through words! I wrote it to her in a note."

Dream paused, gears in his head turning. "You wrote it to *her*? Who's *her*?"

"Minx, goddamnit! I know you said you didn't want anyone else to know, but I *trust* her, Dream. I trust Minx."

"Wh— why didn't you tell me?!"

"Because I knew you'd be suspicious of her! I knew you were up to something as soon as you asked me about the duel, and I wanted to protect her!"

"That's not a good reason to hide it from me, Schlatt, and you know it."

“You don’t get it, Selwyn,” Schlatt spat, eyes furious. “Minx was the only one who was there for me when I was disowned. She joked around with me and gave me gifts on Christmas and celebrated my birthday with me when I had *no one else*. She...” he gulped, clearly hesitant to continue.

“She *what*, Schlatt!”

“She’s the first person I told when my parents died over the summer.”

Dream went quiet, then, eyes widening in disbelief.

“Your parents—”

“Are *dead*, yeah. I’m a fuckin orphan, Dream. Is that what you wanted to hear?”

Dream suddenly felt sick to his stomach. “Stop. I’ve heard enough. Stop.”

Just like that, the curse broke. Schlatt immediately slapped Dream’s hands off his shoulders.

“Well?! Was it fucking worth it?!” he spat, pushing the other boy away. “Huh?! Tell me! Was it worth it?!”

“I— I didn’t mean to— I didn’t know—”

“Of *course* you didn’t know! I didn’t *want* you to know! That was the whole point of my boundaries!” he yelled, balling his fists. “You— don’t just *choose* when you want to respect me, Clay! Either be my friend or *don’t*, but at least try to be goddamn consistent!”

“I— I’m sorry, it was for a good cause! I was trying—!”

Schlatt laughed humorlessly at that and shook his head. “Oh, a good cause?! ‘*I promised George*’ is a good enough cause for you?! Do you know how much of an *asshole* you sound like right now?!” Schlatt raised his fists, desperately looking like he wanted to punch Dream in the face. Dream screwed his eyes shut and braced himself for the blow—

—only to be met with a halfhearted push to the chest.

Schlatt’s shoulders sagged. “I’m not gonna hurt you, Dream,” he whispered. “I just don’t get it. I’ve always had *so* much respect for you. Why can’t you just respect me, too?”

Dream bit his lip, keeping his eyes on the ground. He didn’t know what to say.

Schlatt sighed and turned away. “You already broke one of my promises, but please. *Please* promise me you aren’t gonna do anything to Minx, alright? Whatever plans you have, whatever interrogations, whatever *anything* — just leave her out of it.”

Dream nodded. This had been a terrible idea.

“I’m gonna go downstairs,” he said, turning away from his roommate and towards the door. “Tell Davidson whatever you want, I don’t c— I can’t take it back now, anyway. What’s one more person knowing my secrets?”

“I— I won’t tell him,” Dream stammered. “I’m not— I wouldn’t do that.”

Schlatt chuckled wryly. “I’m not sure I believe that, Dreamy. *I* may not be able to lie, but you... well. *You* definitely can.”



## Chapter End Notes

According to AO3 statistics...you know the drill. Please please please leave kudos and a comment if you enjoyed! We're addicted to those notifications. The comments really do make our day and push us to keep writing this thing.

See you next update!

ken & grass

## Chapter Fourteen || Year Two

### Chapter Summary

George's second year at Hogwarts comes to a close.

### Chapter Notes

Hello again! We're back at it with another magical chapter. This time, it was ME (ken) who got carried away! Muahahaha! I, too, can write many words!

(she says even though it takes her 2 hours to write what grass can write in 20 minutes)  
(I'm too nitpicky lol just read the chapter)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Christmas that year had been George's favorite by far.

So many wonderful things happened over the break. He'd gotten to spend time with his parents *and* Dream, which had been wonderful. He'd seen the world in full color for the first time, which had been *indescribable*. But, best of all, he finally felt like he could relax around his friends again.

"You don't have to worry about any of them, George," Dream had assured him when George brought up the mysterious "test" after the holiday.

"Are you—"

"I'm *sure*," the Slytherin had insisted, green eyes serious. "I'm confident that you have nothing to worry about. Just believe me, please."

And George did. George believed in Dream because he trusted him more than anyone in the world. If Dream was confident that there was nothing to worry about, then George wouldn't worry.

For once, George held in the multitude of questions that were on the tip of his tongue and let the matter rest. His friend seemed like he didn't want to go into detail on the matter, so he dropped it.

It was the biggest relief to finally have the burden of worry lifted from his shoulders. It meant that, come early January, he was *finally* able to greet all of his friends on Platform Nine and Three-Quarters with a total, genuine smile on his face.

For the first time since he and Dream had deciphered the hitlist, George felt free.

The train ride to Hogwarts was filled with loud chatter as the group of friends exchanged stories from their holidays.

"You know, Schlatt," Wilbur said with a grin, throwing an arm around the Slytherin who was sidled up next to him. "I actually have a Christmas present for you."

Schlatt looked genuinely surprised by Wil's statement. "What the hell'd you go and do *that* for?" he groaned, swatting at the Ravenclaw's arm. "I don't have anything to give you back!"

"Oh, don't worry. You don't need to give me anything," Wilbur waved him off. "Techno actually helped me out with it, so it wasn't even all *my* doing."

"Wh—?!"

"Let it be known that my participation was completely involuntary," Technoblade grumbled.

"Oh, come *on*, don't say that. You helped!" Wilbur admonished.

"Wil, you sent a whole *flock* of owls to my house on the first day of break," Techno pointed out. "Where does a man even *get* so many owls?"

"A true gentleman never reveals his secrets."

"Well, what's the present?" Sapnap asked impatiently.

"The present was Wilbur invitin' himself over to my house and forcin' us to watch Shrek," Techno replied in a monotone voice. "That's it."

"Wilbur!" Schlatt gasped. "You watched Shrek for me? Really?"

Wilbur nodded proudly. "I realized how important he was to you, and since I knew Techno watched the movie already, I figured I'd just make him watch it with me."

Sapnap huffed and crossed his arms. "Your surprise Christmas present to him was just...you watching a movie. Without him. That's so lame."

"Oh, shut it, Knapsack, I love it!" Schlatt retorted, pretending to wipe a tear from his eyes as he slapped Wilbur on the back, "Well, how was it?!"

"It was lovely. Movies are such a brilliant invention!"

"An even more brilliant invention than pens?" George snickered.

Wilbur looked scandalized by the question. "Bloody hell, Gogi, don't even joke about that! Of *course* not! Did you know that there are some pens which contain *multiple colors* inside of them?!"

Techno groaned. "He raided our stationary when he came over. I turned around for *one second* to find the Shrek CD, and when I looked back there were no pens left on my desk. All of them: gone. Not even the women and children were saved."

Wilbur nodded without an ounce of shame. "After the Shrek, Claire drove us to a place called *Paperchase*! Gogi, you wouldn't believe it, it's an *entire* store dedicated to selling stationery!"

George raised an eyebrow. "Isn't that just an office supply chain?"

"Yep," Technoblade sighed. "Mom offered to drive us somewhere cool, like an arcade, but instead we went to look at *school supplies*. And as if that wasn't fun enough, she ended up having to ask the staff to use the store loudspeaker because Wilbur got himself lost."

"I *told* you I would be with the pens!" Wilbur rolled his eyes.

"Yeah, in the actual *store* area. You're not supposed to go into the back warehouse, Wilbur, that's

for employees only."

"Well, I didn't know—"

"It says it on the doors right before you walk in!" Techno cried, "Ya can't miss it! Big red letters, right on the door!"

"It's an easy mistake, Techno. I'm sure I'm not the first to be confused," Wilbur sighed.

"Wil, I think you're illiterate."

"Hey. I'm not Muggle-born, alright? I didn't grow up around stationery stores like you lot."

"Firstly: not Muggle-born. Second, I know for a *fact* that no Muggle child would climb into a random delivery truck and almost get sent halfway across the country because they got stuck under a crate o' pens."

"Oh, pish. Could've happened to anybody."

"When the workers went lookin' for ya, they were expectin you to be a *toddler*. Not a *thirteen-year-old*."

"You know, Techno, the staff *did* treat me quite rudely when they found me. I've half a mind to file a complaint."

"You can't file a complaint, Wil. You're permanently banned from that store."

George laughed along with the rest of their group as Wilbur continued to insist he was a victim of "corporate pen mismanagement." Even Dream, who still favored quills most of the time, cracked a smile at the curly haired boy's antics.

Eventually, the boisterous conversation quieted down as a lot of the friends either fell asleep or went off to visit their friends in other compartments. George occupied himself by admiring the scenery outside the window in full color for the first time.

"Is it prettier now?" Dream asked quietly, nudging George with his elbow.

George hummed, taking the glasses off for a few moments before putting them back on and shrugging.

"In a way, it is," he said eventually. "I can see all sorts of new colors now, but sometimes I think it's quite...confusing."

"Really?" Dream asked, surprised.

"Yeah. For instance, I think *my* blue is prettier than yours. When there are all sorts of other colors to keep track of, it can be hard to focus on the best ones."

Dream paused, seemingly contemplating George's answer.

"Well," he said eventually, "how would you know what the best colors are if you couldn't even see most of them before?"

George turned around to look at his friend at that, meeting his gaze. He hadn't noticed before, but with his new glasses on he could see that Dream's green eyes actually had flecks of darker yellow in the center.

“Hm,” he said, face heating up. “Maybe you have a point.”

~~~~~

Once everyone had settled back in at Hogwarts, time passed rather quickly.

All things considered, George had done fairly well on his December assessments. He’d managed to score full marks on his History of Magic exam against all odds, which somewhat made up for the fact that he’d failed DADA.

“Oh, shut *up*,” Dream huffed in the library one day as George was going over his assessment results. “This is why no one likes Ravenclaws. You got a *seventy-six*, George.”

“I *know*! That’s *barely* an ‘Exceeds Expectations!’”

“...you suck.”

“I *know*,” George groaned, burying his head in his hands. “Professor Travers must hate me,” he mumbled.

Sapnap perked up from his spot at their table and shot Dream a devious glance. “Yo, Dream, what did *you* get?”

Dream immediately shoved his exam results in his bag.

“Aww, c’mon Dream, I told you what *I* got in DADA,” Sapnap whined.

“Yeah, and no one asked you. *Plus* you’re a first-year.”

“So?”

“So your tests are easy and no one cares what you got.”

Sapnap huffed indignantly and crossed his arms. “*Lame*. I bet you failed.”

“Did not.”

“What’s the percentage, then?”

Dream looked away and then muttered something under his breath.

“What, Dream?” Sapnap teased. “You’re gonna have to speak up, dude.”

The Slytherin shot Sapnap a glare.

“I said, fifty-two.”

It was George’s turn to gasp and shoot Dream a disbelieving look.

“*Fifty-two*? But...Dream! You’re actually *good* at DADA!”

Dream shrugged. “Hey, I passed. You *know* I don’t really care about tests.”

“B-but still! I didn’t know you were at risk of *failing*. Blimey, Dream, I could have helped you study!”

“Nah,” Dream said, waving away George’s concerns. “You already had plenty of stuff to worry about. Can we ditch this place and go down to the Great Hall, already? I’m hungry.”

George rolled his eyes. “I literally *just* watched you eat a Cauldron Cake on your way to the library.”

“I’m a growing boy, George. I need food. Are you coming or not?”

~~~~~

The Slytherin vs Ravenclaw quidditch match was scheduled for the third weekend in February, and the House rivalries became noticeably more apparent as the weeks went on.

Minx, for one, insisted on violating the school dress code by wearing bright green robes to all of her classes and then acting offended when professors took away House Points. George learned the hard way that he was not allowed to laugh when this happened; when he’d accidentally let out a chuckle after Professor Borealis reprimanded the girl in Muggle Studies, George had been mysteriously hit with a Bat-Bogey Hex and the whole class had to pause while Borealis cast the counter-spell.

Techno and GB80 were rarely in the Great Hall anymore. The two quidditch players were always either off practicing or strategizing with their teammates, leaving George wondering how on earth they got any homework done for their classes.

“Why does everyone seem so much more excited for this match?” George wondered out loud one day during lunch. Dream snorted while Minx just looked at George from across the table like he was the biggest idiot to roam the earth.

“What are ya, a moron?! This match could determine the whole fuckin cup!” she cried, viciously stabbing a potato on her plate. George winced and shuffled a little closer to Dream on the bench.

“I-I thought there were still *four matches* left, though...” the Ravenclaw stuttered, confused.

“Gogi, think about it,” Wilbur cut in. “Since Slytherin and Ravenclaw both won their respective first matches, whoever wins this match will have a *huge* advantage going into the rest of the cup. The winner of this round will be the winner of the winners!”

“—which is why Slytherin is gonna crush you guys,” Dream commented, earning eye rolls from the Ravenclaws and smirks from the Slytherins.

“Mate, have you *seen* Techno fly? The man rides a Cleansweep and *still* flies faster than anyone else on the pitch,” Wilbur responded.

“Yeah, but he’ll have to *stay* on his broom if he wants to score any goals, Wil,” Schlatt pointed out. “One bludger from GB80 and the kid’ll be outta the running. Slytherin’s got this one in the bag.”

Predictably, the rest of the conversation consisted solely of heated quidditch commentary, which George found to be a bit boring after a while. Dream eventually nudged him and nodded towards

the door, an unspoken question in his eyes.

George nodded and stood up from the table, Dream following suit wordlessly. Their friends were so absorbed in their debate that they hardly even noticed their departure. The only exception being Schlatt, who eyed them both silently as they walked away.

~~~~~

No Slytherins were allowed at the Ravenclaw table on the day of the quidditch match.

Not even Philza's influence was enough to make the other Ravenclaw prefects turn a blind eye to the rivals in their midst. Dream, Schlatt, and Minx had been immediately booed by every Ravenclaw in the vicinity when they approached wearing their green paraphernalia. To be fair, Philza hadn't tried *that* hard to persuade the other prefects to leave them alone; the sixth-year had quite the competitive streak of his own when it came to House cups. Even for Philza, fraternizing with the enemy was off the table. Literally.

The tension between the blue and green houses was so thick that George couldn't believe it when he saw Technoblade stand up from their table and take several steps towards the Slytherin table.

"Er, Techno?" he called out to his roommate, who paused and stared back at George blankly.

"Yeah?"

"Why are you, a Ravenclaw chaser, about to walk towards the Slytherin table?"

Eret paused his eating to gaze at Techno in shock.

"Wait, what's this lad doing? Techno, are you *mad*? They'll eat you alive!" he exclaimed.

Techno just shrugged his shoulders. "I'm just gonna head off n' make sure Gémure-Boye is fed," he said nonchalantly, holding up a plate piled high with breakfast food.

The other Ravenclaw boys were understandably confused. "Techno, that's the enemy," Eret said, eyeing the plate wearily. "Aren't you all about crushing victories? Why would you *help* the other team?"

"I know what I'm doin', Eret," Techno replied, stacking another plate on top of the food pile to prevent it from toppling over. "Merlin himself once said: 'Build your opponent a golden bridge to retreat across.' If I'm gonna win, I want GB to know that I gave him every possible advantage beforehand. I will lull him into a false sense of fidelity n' then — *BAM!* I'll destroy the man. After he loses, he'll have no choice but to admit my quidditch superiority! After all, I will have had no advantage: we will have eaten the same food *and* had the same trainin'! My plan is foolproof!"

Eret blinked in surprise at the speech, glancing back down at his plate. "Alright, then. Looks like you know what you're doing."

"I *do*! See, when I give him this plate I'll tell him: 'Enjoy your meal, buddy. Don't eat too much or you'll get sick.' This'll plant a seed of doubt in his mind!"

Eret nodded along, growing more concerned for his roommate's mental health by the second. "But,

Techno, how will that—”

“Well, I’m glad you asked! You see, he’ll think I poisoned the food with somethin’ to make him sick, so he’ll be hesitant to eat it! But it’s either *this* plate or the food on his table, and he *knows* this food is better. So then he’ll have this perfectly good breakfast in front of him, but his *mind*, Eret. His mind’s gonna tear him apart. He won’t know if the risk is worth the reward, and his inner conflict will *destroy him*.”

"Mate, I'm so glad the Sorting Hat settled on Ravenclaw in the end," Wilbur chuckled. "You're downright terrifying."

They watched Techno walk up to the Slytherin beater and hold a short conversation. When Techno returned to the Ravenclaw table a few minutes later with a disgruntled expression, it was clear that his attempts at psychological warfare had not gone as he’d hoped.

“What happened, then?” Eret asked the disappointed chaser.

“Gémure-Boye didn’t wait for me to say my line,” Techno grumbled. “He inhaled half the plate before I had a chance to say anythin’ to him.”

Wilbur laughed, standing up to pat Techno on the back. “Well, mate, you tried. Now how about you head off to the changing rooms or whatever while the rest of us find some blue face paint before the game?”

~~~~~

When the students were finally released to go occupy the stands, George was nearly trampled by the stampede of people all rushing to claim the best seats possible. Among the Slytherin supporters, he noticed Minx attempting to wrestle Quackity, the Gryffindor first-year, into bright green robes. The first-year was crying out for help, but George wasn’t foolish enough to intervene in Minx’s affairs and he shuffled away as fast as possible.

As the three roommates scoured the Ravenclaw stands for good seats, Wilbur suddenly spotted Philza in the fourth row and quickly made a beeline for the prefect.

“Ah, Philza! Bless your beautiful soul! Are those three empty seats I see?” Wilbur called out as the three roommates approached. Philza grinned in response and waved the second-years over.

"Why, yes, Wil, indeed they are. In fact, they're honorary seats for th' star players' roommates," Phil declared.

“How’d you manage to keep *three entire seats* empty?” Eret asked curiously.

Philza leaned in close and whispered conspiratorially. “I may or may not have charmed them to bite the arses of anyone who isn’t you. Ya didn’t hear it from me, though, yeah?”

Wilbur laughed while George and Eret exchanged a nervous look.

"That sounds....illegal," George muttered.

"Don't be such a downer, Gogi! Philza Magic protected these seats for us!" Wilbur cried, slapping



George on the shoulder. "You should be thankful!"

"I didn't say I *wasn't* thankful. I just said—"

George didn't get to finish his sentence because Wilbur chose that moment to plop himself down into one of the seats, which bit him immediately. The curly haired boy screamed in agony and clutched his bottom.

Philza burst into laughter. "Okay, okay, I couldn't resist doin' that jus' once," he coughed out, waving his wand to remove the charm from the seats. "I thought it'd be funny, and I was right. That was hilarious."

"Philza!" Wilbur groaned as he tried to get a look at his injury. "That bloody hurt!"

The prefect waved his hand dismissively and stood up from his seat. "Put some ice on it, Wil, and you'll be fine."

"Kiss it better!"

"Aaaand that's my cue to leave. I'm out! Enjoy the game, boys."

"Wait, Phil, don't leave us yet!"

"Have fun!"

With that, Philza Magic disappeared into the crowd.

"That wasn't funny," Wilbur grumbled.

"It was *kind* of funny," Eret snickered, taking the seat to Wilbur's right. "Looks like the seats are safe now, so you two can probably sit down."

George shrugged and took the seat beside Eret. Wilbur just pouted and crossed his arms.

"You lot can take the seats, I've been traumatized," he sniffed. "I'm sitting on the floor."

"Won't that just make your injury worse?" Eret asked.

"Let me be dramatic, Eret, please."

Five students proceeded to trip over Wilbur before the boy finally relented and took the seat.

George checked his watch. The game wasn't supposed to be starting for another fifteen minutes, but just about everyone was already in the stands. Around him, people were placing bets and putting finishing touches on signs. A certain Gryffindor a few rows over was selling snacks for five times their regular price while Bad trailed behind him and asked him to stop.

George wondered what was happening in the Slytherin stands. Dream was probably dressed from head to toe in Slytherin paraphernalia by now, knowing Minx. Hopefully someone had been able to dissuade her from bringing powder bombs to the game again.

Just then, George saw something long and fluffy brush against Wilbur's face. Wilbur seemed too preoccupied with his own thoughts to pay it much attention, though, so all the curly haired boy did was swat it away absently with his hand.

George quirked an eyebrow when the mysterious fluffy thing brushed against his roommate a

second time. The thing was bushy and orange in color from what George could tell through his corrective glasses, but it had a white tip at the end. Kind of like...a fox tail?

No, it was too big to be a fox tail. Besides, how would a fox have even gotten into the stands?

The tail kept moving back and forth in front of Wilbur's face. Eventually, George *had* to say something.

"Um, Wilbur? I think you're in the way of something."

Wilbur perked his head up at the use of his name, getting a faceful of tail in the process. Wilbur's expression became puzzled as he regarded the odd furry thing in front of him.

"Oh! Well, what's *this*?" he exclaimed, eyes following the tail's movements.

"Um, it *looks* like a fox tail, but—"

"A fox!" Wilbur's eyes lit up in excitement. "Oh, I love foxes! They're so adorable! D'you think I can pet it?"

George opened his mouth, about to caution his friend, but Wilbur was already excitedly reaching out to grab the fluffy tail before he could say anything.

Wilbur's fingers curled around the tail and tugged a bit. Instantly, the appendage started to twitch in discomfort, squirming in Wilbur's grip.

"It's so soft!" he gasped, petting the fur in spite of the tail's clear escape attempts. "George, this fox has *brilliant* fur care! Do you think foxes know how to use conditioners?"

"Hey, um, sorry to *interrupt*, but do you mind?" somebody coughed out in front of them.

The boys turned to glance at the speaker while the tail continued its attempted escape. In front of them sat an odd-looking Hufflepuff boy. The student had bright orange hair with white patches in it and was staring at them with brown eyes so light in color that they almost looked yellow. The boy's lips were pulled back in an uncomfortable grimace, revealing a set of sharp teeth.

"Pardon?" Wilbur asked, moving to pet the tail again.

"No! Ugh, the *tail*! Stop! Stop *touching*!" the Hufflepuff boy cried, snatching the furry appendage out of Wilbur's hand and hugging it close to his chest. "You're not even petting in the direction of the growth, man! You messed it all up!"

"Wh— that's mine! Find your own fox to pet, mate!" Wilbur yelled, pulling the tail back and eliciting a scream from the Hufflepuff.

"No! It's *literally* mine! Stop pulling it! That's *attached* to me!"

Wilbur rolled his eyes. "Pff, yeah, nice try. You don't exactly *look* like a bloody fox."

"Oh *really*? I don't look like a fox?"

"Plenty of people have red hair, mate, you're not special," Wilbur snickered. "Wasn't there a whole family of 'em at this school at one point?"

"Well, did those other redheads also have fangs? Did they have this... black, wet nose thing? Claws!?" He wiggled his fingers around, showing off the long, thin nails attached at the ends of

black hands.

"Oh wow, those are cool," Eret whistled appreciatively.

"I— uh, thanks," muttered the Hufflepuff, his tone taking on an embarrassed note at the compliment. The boy raked his claws through his hair, causing a set of black tipped ears to pop out from the top of his head, much to everyone else's astonishment.

"Merlin's beard! You've got fox ears!" Wilbur cried, finally releasing the tail in his hands. "Why didn't you start with those?!"

"Well, you didn't believe this was my tail!" the fox boy cried, pulling his tail towards him and stroking the fur back into its correct position.

"Yeah, because the tail isn't right on your *bloody* head!" Wilbur yelled back, wiping his hands on his robes frantically. "Oh, I'm so sorry, uh, I— how do I even apologize for this?"

"I think 'sorry I grabbed your tail, I didn't know it was attached to you' sounds about right," George supplied.

"Right, sorry I grabbed your tail, uh...." Wilbur furrowed his eyebrows. "Wait, what's your name?" he asked.

"Wow, Wilbur, you just touched a kid's tail without even knowing his name?" Eret chuckled.

"He *pet* my tail and had it in a *vice grip*, actually, without even knowing my name," the boy grumbled. "And it's Fundy."

Wilbur coughed to hide a small laugh. "Sorry, hold on, your name is Fundy, and you're a fox? Fundy the Fox?"

"Please don't."

"No, no, the alliteration is brilliant, really," Wilbur chuckled. "I'm sorry about your tail, Fundy the furry fox."

"Oh my god."

"Fundy the fantastic furry fox. Fundy the fine fantastic furry fox. Fundy the—"

"Erm, why exactly *are* you a fox?" George asked, cutting Wilbur off.

Wilbur gasped, "Gogi! You can't just ask someone why they're a fox! That's very insensitive."

George bit his lip in confusion. "O-oh, are fox people, um, a common...thing? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be racist or anything, I really didn't know—"

"George, being new isn't an excuse for being ignorant," Eret tsked, shaking his head and folding his arms.

Fundy gave Eret a questioning look before twitching his ears and turning back to George. "You're fine, man. No hard feelings."

George breathed a sigh of relief at the boy's reassurances. "Really, though, I *am* sorry. I've never met an animal person before—"

"Woah, George! *Animal person?!'*" Wilbur exclaimed, leaping forward to slap his hands over the place where Fundy *would've* had human ears. "Don't listen to him! Gosh, I'm so sorry he said that to you."

Fundy grabbed Wilbur's wrists and pried the hands off of his head, looking somewhat irked by the boys' odd behavior. "What are you guys—?"

"Shhhh, Fundy, you're alright. Breathe with me, okay?" Wilbur instructed, demonstrating a few exaggerated deep breaths for Fundy's benefit.

George was about to ask Eret for advice on how to proceed further without offending the fox boy even more when he saw that said roommate looked like he was barely containing a laugh.

"Eret? Did something—"

Suddenly, Eret and Wilbur both burst into laughter while Fundy and George looked on in confusion.

"You should've seen your face, George!" Wilbur finally choked out in between laughs.

"Wil, I can't believe you forgot where his ears were!" Eret chuckled, pointing to the fox ears on top of Fundy's head.

"I was operating by reaction only, I had to think fast."

"Wait, wait, what are you two laughing about?" George cut in, growing annoyed.

"I think your friends just pulled a prank on you," Fundy explained with a swish of his tail.

"Wait, so I *wasn't* being insensitive?"

"Nah, man, I wasn't offended. There's no such thing as 'animal people.'"

"Why'd you scare me like that, then?!" George cried, slapping Wilbur on the shoulder.

"Ow!" Wilbur said with a wince. "Because it was *funny!* We saw an opportunity, Gogi, and we took it."

"I can't believe you idiots," George grumbled, turning back to Fundy. "So...if it's not *actually* rude, then may I ask why you have...erm...such fox-like qualities?"

"Yeah," Eret added, "I'm actually quite curious, as well."

Fundy sighed and twitched his little black nose. "Yeah. It's not all *that* exciting, though, guys. I've had to tell people this story, like, five hundred times."

"Well, *I* for one didn't ask for any explanation," Wilbur pointed out. "I only have two questions for you."

"...alright."

"One: may I pet your tail?"

Fundy gave Wilbur an odd look at the request. "Uh...that's a bit weird."

"Two," Wilbur continued, "I would also like to know: do you condition your tail? It is *incredibly*

soft."

Fundy snorted and stroked his own tail absently. "Well, I actually have to use a different kind of soap on my fur."

"Why's that?" Wilbur asked, intrigued.

"Human soap irritates animal skin," the Hufflepuff explained. "My hands and feet don't have fur, but the skin has a different texture to human skin, so I still have to use animal soap on them."

"That sounds like expensive showering."

"It *is* expensive."

"Can't you just lick yourself clean like an actual fox?"

"Okay," Eret interrupted, "Can we maybe hear about why he's a fox and *then* you two can get into his grooming habits?"

"Right, sorry," Fundy huffed. "It's really not anything crazy. My parents were authorized by the Ministry to become registered animagi, but one night when I was a baby they accidentally left their potions out in the open. I drank both vials, fell asleep, and in the morning, well...I looked like this."

"Blimey," Eret said. "That must've been a shock for your parents."

"And those potions take a bloody long time to brew!" Wilbur exclaimed. "You finished *both* of them!?"

"Yep. I didn't leave behind a single drop. I was lucky to have survived the whole thing, actually. The potion can kill you if you take it incorrectly, so my parents were just grateful that I lived. They kind of gave up on becoming animagi after that, though."

"Well, I don't blame them!" Wilbur replied. "Can you imagine going through the whole process of brewing the potion, keeping a mandrake leaf in your mouth for a whole month and everything, only to have some little bugger come along and ruin it all?!"

Fundy rolled his eyes at that, sparking a heated discussion involving animagus potions and random fox-related details, before a sudden whistle-blowing called everyone's attention.

"Students of Hogwarts! The Quidditch match between Slytherin and Ravenclaw is about to begin! Please welcome our talented players to the pitch!"

~~~~~

Techno knew he'd been brilliant during the game.

The quidditch match had been... *eventful*, to say the least. Technoblade had pulled off maneuver after maneuver effortlessly, scoring three goals within the three minutes, much to the Ravenclaw crowd's delight. From his position high above the stands he even saw Professor Flitwick jump for joy after a particularly well-executed barrel roll.

No, there was no denying that Techno had been brilliant.

So *why*, then, had his team *lost*?

The Slytherin Beaters had been targeting him, but he could handle targeting. He'd dodged every single bludger aimed at his head. The one time that a bludger from GB80 succeeded in hitting him in the side, he'd pulled himself back up onto his Cleansweep with only one arm in a spectacular display of upper body strength.

No, the targeting hadn't been the problem.

The problem was that Techno had gotten *complacent*.

Ravenclaw had been a hundred and forty points ahead of Slytherin. The lead had made him cocky.

Two hours into the game, Vovchuk caught the snitch in a spectacular dive. Everyone, including Techno, had thought the Seeker had been feinting; Vovchuk was known for pulling brazen stunts to throw off her opponents, and the Ravenclaw Seeker had already fallen for six of the Slytherin's feints during that game.

But of course the *one time* Techno hadn't paid any mind to their opponents' Seeker's antics had been the time she'd actually caught the snitch.

The final score was one hundred eighty to one hundred seventy. Ravenclaw lost by only ten points, the equivalent of just one goal.

One goal. If he'd just scored *one* little goal, their team wouldn't have lost.

He felt like a failure.

Techno had been completely unapproachable after the game. He'd refused to accept any congratulations and had practically teleported into their shared dorm room the second that the score had been called.

George and Eret, thankfully, left him alone. Wilbur, on the other hand, seemed adamant on being as annoying as humanly possible.

The guy wouldn't stop knocking on his door no matter how hard Techno ignored him. After he realized that *Alohomora* wouldn't work either, the other Ravenclaw simply resorted to body slamming the wooden barrier until Philza came upstairs and demanded he stop. Thank god for Philza.

Techno didn't open the door until after dinner, which he'd skipped in favor of brooding. Surprisingly, the prefect himself was the first person to pop his head into the room.

"Techno, mate! How are ya?" he asked cheerfully.

Techno gave the prefect a defeated look. "Just peachy," he replied monotonically.

"There's that ray of sunshine we all know 'n love," Phil chuckled, taking a few steps into their room. "Why don't you come downstairs? Don't worry, I had 'em all clear outta the common room just for you. Your mates brought you dinner."

"I'm not hungry," Techno lied.

"Hah!" He scoffed, "Save that load o' shit for someone who'll hear it. Now come downstairs before I take House Points."

“From your *own* House?”

“I’m pretty sure we’ll lose a lot more if ya die of starvation on my watch. Now come on, your friends wanna be allowed into their room!”

George and Eret shuffled into the bedroom once Techno had vacated the premises, obediently making his way to the common room. It was empty, just like Phil promised. A plate piled high with food awaited him by the fireplace, and Techno wasted no time in scarfing it down.

Once he’d eaten everything, Philza patted him on the shoulder. “Are we feelin all better?”

Techno nodded.

“Mhm. Now, are ya gonna tell me why you’re bein all moody, or do I have to threaten you again?”

The second-year groaned. “Phil, do I *really* hafta—”

“Techno, mate, you’ve been feelin sorry for yourself all day, and, frankly, it doesn’t suit ya. Tell me what’s botherin you so I can help you get back to your usual arse-kicking self,” Philza commanded gently.

Techno stared down at his empty plate, biting his lip nervously. He knew that there was no point in stalling, Philza would find out eventually so it would be best to just get it over with now. He sighed. “I *know* I’m the best,” he said finally. “I- *we* lost today, ‘n I hated it, but I still know I was the best player on the pitch.”

Philza furrowed his eyebrows. “So then what’s the problem?”

“The problem is that *I* know I’m the best, but everyone else doesn’t.”

“Techno,” Philza chided, “I think everyone with *eyes* can see that you’re talented.”

“That’s not it, though. People equate victory with capability, Phil. They measure excellence in success. No matter how much *I* know I’m the best, nobody else is gonna see that unless I win. That’s why I can’t afford to lose, or fail, or mess up, or—”

“Deep breaths, mate,” Philza cut him off, noticing the way Techno had begun to ball his fists. “You’ve clearly been puttin a lotta thought into this, eh?”

Techno released a long breath through his nostrils. “Well, I did kinda put myself in solitary confinement for ten hours. I had a bit of free time.”

“Wanna know what I think?” Philza replied. After Techno nodded, he continued. “*I* think that this is about more than just quidditch.”

Techno averted his eyes and squirmed uncomfortably. He should’ve known nothing would get past this man. In response, Philza placed an arm around the second-year’s shoulder.

“Ya know,” the older boy said gently, “I understand what you’re saying here. It’s a lotta pressure on ya when you’re always tryina prove that you’re the best.”

Techno relaxed at the prefect’s words of reassurance, only to tense again when Phil said his next sentence.

“I don’t think ya *have* to prove yourself, though.”

Techno looked up at Phil with a weary expression. “What?”

Phil chuckled. “Well, I’m not you and *I* know you’re the best, right? If I figured that out without ya winnin today, what’s ta stop others from comin to the same conclusion?”

“Obviously you’re just sayin’ that cuz I spilled my guts to you,” Techno snorted. “Now that I’m bein’ all vulnerable, you can’t exactly tell me I’m garbage.”

Philza smiled and shook his head fondly. “Techno, Techno, must you *always* ruin our heartfelt moments?”

“It’s the best part.”

“Aw, c’mon,” Phil snickered, squeezing his shoulder tighter, “Ya know, I’m not the *only* one who knows that you’re the best.”

Techno opened his mouth to reply with some witty retort, but was cut off by the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps from behind them.

“It is complete!” a voice declared.

He shared a knowing, exasperated look with Phil, because of *course* Wilbur was here.

They turned around in time to see Wilbur standing at the common room entrance with his hands behind his back and a stupid grin on his face.

“*What’s* complete?” Techno asked his giddy roommate.

“You’ll see!” Wilbur sang. “Close your eyes, Techno. I have a gift for you!”

Techno grimaced. “Uh, no thanks, Wilbur. Not really feelin’ like acceptin’ any gifts right about now.”

Wilbur just beamed and ignored his roommate’s words. “The beautiful thing about gifts, Techno, is that it’s not up to *you* to decide when you get them! Now close your eyes!”

Phil shrugged when Techno looked up at him for guidance, confirming the second-year’s suspicion that the prefect *definitely* knew what was going on. Too tired to care, Techno sighed deeply and closed his eyes like Wilbur asked. Soon, he felt the other boy place something lightweight on top of his head.

“Ta da! You can open them now!” Wilbur declared.

And so Techno did, reaching up to touch the thing on his head carefully. It was circular in shape and felt like it was made out of thick paper, with several pointy edges sticking up at regular intervals.

“A...a crown?” Techno asked.

“Yes! It’s a crown!” Wilbur whooped, practically vibrating with pride at his own creation. “Isn’t it brilliant?”

“Well, uh, I can’t really see it since it’s on my head...” Techno trailed off, still ghosting his hand over the paper. “W-why’d you make me a crown, Wil?”

Wilbur scoffed at the question and rolled his eyes. “*Why?* Because you’re the best, *obviously*.”

C'mon, Techno, I thought you were smart!"

Techno felt at a loss for words. "How...how did you know?" he asked dumbly.

"How do I know that *Technoblade* is the best? Blimey, I think you spent a bit too much time in that room on your own. Are you feeling alright?" Wilbur asked, pressing the back of his hand to Techno's forehead.

"I don't—I don't get it," Techno stammered.

"What's not to get, Techno? Wilbur knows you're the best!" Philza said with a knowing smile.

Techno touched the crown on his head again as he tried to process his thoughts.

Wilbur knew he was the best.

His team lost the game, he had failed, and Wilbur still thought he was the best. He'd even made Techno a crown to prove it.

He wasn't sure when he'd started crying. He'd always been a silent crier, so it came as a bit of a surprise when Philza and Wilbur both enveloped him in a group hug.

Yet, in spite of the tears, Techno had never felt better. Because maybe he didn't need the whole world to know he was the best.

He was the best in the eyes of those who mattered, and maybe that was enough.

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It was the first Friday in April and the second-years had just finished another Muggle Studies lesson with Professor Borealis. They had been learning about the various subjects taught at Muggle schools and how they were different to the syllabi of wizarding schools across the world. Professor Borealis had explained how Muggles emphasize knowledge of the three natural sciences: physics, chemistry, and biology.

For the most part, the lesson had been going very well. Most of the students were fascinated by the concept of chemical reactions, which Professor Borealis had demonstrated by mixing some baking soda and vinegar together to create a bubbly volcano.

"Wait, *that's* why that fizzing thing happens?" Wilbur had asked with wide eyes.

"Indeed, Mr. Soot. This is what Muggles call a *neutralization reaction* in chemistry. The bubbles form due to the production of carbon dioxide gas."

"Wow. Absolutely fascinating," Wilbur breathed.

A Slytherin girl at the back of the class tentatively raised her hand to ask a question. "What's a carbon dioxide, Professor? Is it like a spell?"

A few other students began murmuring at this. "Will we be learning more about this chemistry stuff?" another person standing off to the side asked.

“Quiet down, students, quiet down,” Professor Borealis instructed, waiting until there was silence before continuing. “Unfortunately, the Department of Magical Education has not deemed subjects such as the natural sciences to be of importance to wizardkind, which means that we will not be delving into complex scientific topics. Only the basics for you, I’m afraid.”

A few students groaned in disappointment. Dream merely shrugged beside George.

“We’d never need to know any of that stuff in real life, anyway,” the Slytherin boy whispered. Before George could respond, Professor Borealis snapped her head in their direction and narrowed her eyes at Dream.

“What was that, Mr. Selwyn?”

“Nothing, nothing,” Dream said quickly.

Their professor stepped closer to Dream’s desk and placed her hands on her hips. “No, Mr. Selwyn, if you have any thoughts on our subject matter, I encourage you to share them with the class.”

Everyone’s attention was on Dream, then. The other students waited eagerly to see how the boy would respond.

“Well, uh…” he began, glancing at George before clearing his throat to continue. “I just said that we’d never need to know any of this stuff in real life, anyway.”

Someone in the back of the class snorted. Professor Borealis’ face was unreadable as she regarded the student before her.

Finally, she turned back around and walked back to her desk.

“It is a shame you feel that way, Mr. Selwyn. Though I suppose it is understandable. After all,” she said, “you have grown up in a world where people can light up an entire room with a flick of a wand.”

With those words, the professor flicked her wand and cast a silent *Lumos*.

“When your food is cold,” she continued, casting a nonverbal fire spell to light a candle on her desk, “you can say a few magic words and heat it up. You can travel great distances by merely stepping into a fireplace. You can summon lost objects by calling their names. It makes sense that you wouldn’t recognize the necessity of physics or chemistry.”

The class was silent as the students contemplated their professor’s words. Dream sat up a bit straighter in his seat.

“It is a pity that so many wizards fail to see the value of non-magical disciplines,” Professor Borealis said with a sigh. “Knowledge of basic biology, for example, could have prevented so much conflict. If most purebloods could just recognize the foolishness of their own inbreeding, they would realize that all of these squabbles over blood status are utterly stupid.”

George’s eyes widened at their professor’s comment. Beside him, Dream tensed.

“Excuse me?” the Slytherin boy called out, visibly irritated. “Did you just say ‘inbreeding?’”

By now, several other students were beginning to whisper to each other nervously. Professor Borealis blinked several times before clarifying.

“Yes, I did,” she said. “Pureblood families have been inbreeding for centuries in their quest to produce powerful witches and wizards. If they understood simple biology, however, they’d realize that marrying their own cousins accomplishes quite the opposite.”

Suddenly, Minx stood up from her chair and crossed her arms. “Oi! You can’t just call a whole group o’ people *inbred* like we’re fuckin’ *animals*!”

Minx’s words prompted gasps from everyone in the room apart from Schlatt, who muttered something about Minx and animals under his breath. Professor Borealis looked livid.

“Miss Minx, you may *not* speak to me in that manner. Ten points from Slytherin,” she snapped angrily.

“Well *you* can’t go around spouting *rubbish*! This class is nothing but useless hogwash. The greatest wizards of all time were purebloods, so maybe you should wind yer neck in and ‘ave some *respect*!”

“Minx! *Twenty* points from Slytherin. Off to McGonagall’s office with you, now!”

The Slytherin girl huffed and stomped out of the classroom, muttering profanities under her breath. George watched her leave with a feeling of dread in his stomach.

An awkward silence ensued. After several moments, the professor took a deep breath and began to speak again.

“Well, that was—”

“She had a *point*, though, Professor.”

George closed his eyes and suppressed a groan. Of course Dream wasn’t going to drop it.

Professor Borealis pinched the bridge of her nose, looking like the picture of irritation. Dream didn’t wait for permission to continue before he pressed on.

“Look at most of the great witches and wizards in our history books. I wouldn’t call Salazar Slytherin *inbred*. What about Giffard Abbott? The Peverell Brothers? Isolt Sayre?” Dream continued, voice rising with every name. “You’re calling all of these great people inbred, but they were all extremely powerful wizards.”

Their professor waited patiently for Dream to finish speaking. Once the Slytherin boy had said his piece, she cleared her throat.

“Mr. Selwyn. How many generations ago did all of the people you named live?”

Dream paused to think. “Um...I’m not sure. Hundreds of years ago.”

“And what happened to their descendants? Go on; you must know. The Selwyns keep track of pureblood family lines, I’m sure.”

Dream glared at Borealis but nonetheless answered the question.

“Slytherin’s line is...extinct,” he said, furrowing his brows in thought. “The Abbott line is no longer pure...the Peverell line is extinct. So is the Sayre line.”

Professor Borealis raised an eyebrow. “So, three out of four of those pureblood lines are extinct. The other is no longer *pure*. What does that tell you, Selwyn?”

Dream huffed. “That doesn’t mean—”

“*Quiet*. All of the greatest wizards of the modern era are half-blood or less. Albus Dumbledore. Harry Potter. Hermione Granger. If by ‘great’ you mean *powerful*, you could even throw in Lord Voldemort, a *half-blood*. The truth is that there are no more ‘great’ pureblood families left. They have all been destroyed by their own foolish customs.”

The bell rang, then, signalling the end of class. Borealis dismissed the students with a wave of her hand.

“Class dismissed. Don’t forget to hand in your essays on Monday,” she called out as the students began to exit.

George hurried to catch up with Dream, who was on his feet before their professor had even finished speaking. It didn’t take a Ravenclaw to know that he was furious.

In the hallway, George reached out and put a hand on Dream’s shoulder. The other boy didn’t even turn around.

“Dream, calm down,” George panted. It took Dream a few seconds, but soon the boy whirled around to face his friend. His green eyes were alight with indignation.

“*Inbred*. Who does she think she is?” he spat, clenching and unclenching his fists.

George gulped nervously and tried to steer them in the direction of the Great Hall. “She didn’t mean it like that, Dream, and you know it.”

“What are we, pet kneazles?” the Slytherin asked sarcastically. “You can’t just call your students inbred!”

“Dream, she was only suggesting that diverse gene pools may lead to greater magical ability. She wasn’t—”

“She called my family *foolish*. She doesn’t know *shit* about me or my family!”

“Dream, I *really* think you’re overthinking all of this. She was just making a point about biology, it wasn’t like she was *trying* to offend—”

Dream rolled his eyes and abruptly turned in the opposite direction, heading for the staircase to the Slytherin dungeons.

“I’ll see you later, George,” he threw over his shoulder. “I need to cool off.”

George watched his best friend walk away, his own feelings a jumbled mess. When he finally arrived at the Great Hall, he saw no tell-tale green robes at the Ravenclaw table. None of their Slytherin friends had come to lunch.

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Dream didn’t raise his hand in Muggle Studies for the rest of the academic year.

Despite George’s best efforts, the Slytherin boy refused to spend any time studying for Professor

Borealis' class. By the time June rolled around and the end-of-year examinations were a mere week away, George had given up on trying to help Dream pass the class.

One failing grade wouldn't hurt his friend's prospects *too* much, he supposed.

George didn't have time to worry about Dream, anyway. He had his own assessments to complete. When he wasn't in the library, George could be found studying a textbook by the light of the fire in the Ravenclaw common room along with several of his nervous Housemates.

Even Techno, who usually only showed up to their study sessions as a formality, started waking up from his naps to skim through his textbooks for twenty minutes or so before falling back asleep. It was the most George had ever seen him study apart from the days leading up to his disastrous surprise party.

Three days before his first exam, George decided to get some studying done in the library after dinner. Once he'd informed Dream of his plans, he excused himself from the table and made his way down the corridor. Unfortunately, his favorite table was occupied by a group of older students, so he had to settle for a smaller one along the back wall.

Three minutes into his History of Magic revision, he heard footsteps approaching.

"Sorry, this seat's taken. I'm waiting for a friend," he mumbled without looking up from his book.

Instead of leaving, the stranger sat right down at his table.

Irritated, George looked up and saw none other than Minx sitting directly across from him in the seat he'd reserved for Dream.

"Oh. Minx?" he said, surprised. "I didn't realize you liked to study here."

Minx scoffed. "That's because I *don't*, you—" she cut herself off, taking a deep breath before shooting him a wide smile. On anyone else, the expression might have looked warm and welcoming.

On Minx it looked downright terrifying.

George glanced around, assessing the area and mentally mapping his escape routes in case the conversation went sour.

"So then, uh...why *are* you here?" he asked. When Minx's eyes widened, he immediately winced and backtracked. "I-I mean, you can be wherever you want! Obviously. B-but I was just wondering —"

"Listen here, you—!" her retort abruptly cut off again as she clenched her fists. "Listen, *George*, I just saw you sitting over here all alone and I wanted to be nice. Since, you know, you looked all sad and lonely. It's embarrassing, studying all by yourself. People'll think you have no friends."

George looked around at the other occupants of the library and noted that everyone seemed much too engrossed in their studying to pay any attention to his social life. He decided not to point this out to Minx, however.

"Well, uh, thanks," he said instead, turning back to his textbook. He supposed there were worse reasons for Minx to be approaching him, and worse people to be sitting next to him as he studied.

After a long minute passed in which George continued to read silently, Minx huffed and leaned

over to see the contents of George's textbook.

"What the hell are you even studying for? Doesn't your big blue brain already know everything?" she demanded.

"Big blue brain?" George echoed, leaning back a little in his seat.

"Yeah. What's the point of bein a Ravenclaw if you're just going to study like everyone else?"

George furrowed his eyebrows at the question. "Well, being a Ravenclaw doesn't mean you suddenly know everything."

Minx rolled her eyes. "Are ye sure you're not just embarrassed to tell me you're the dumb one of your group?" she snickered.

"Wh— *no*."

"Well, I don't see any of your *other* bird boys around studyin like you," she tsked. "I can tell yer embarrassed. Ye don't have to be."

"That's not... I don't *have* to study right now," George defended himself. "I just feel better when I do. It's like...extra protection. Just in case the exam is even harder than I expect. It's better to be safe than sorry."

"Well I feel *really* sorry for people who waste their time in the library when they don't need to," Minx replied, holding her hand up when George opened his mouth to protest. "But it's *cute*, relax."

George's eyes went comically wide. "Cute?!" he spluttered. Had Minx really just *complimented* him? Did Minx even *do* compliments?

Apparently, she did, because she'd called him *cute*.

"In, like, a weird *nerd* way," she snickered, a grin spreading across her face as she noticed George's cheeks reddening. "'N so's your face when you go all red like that. It just makes me wanna punch you!"

George scooted his chair back even further from the girl before him, suddenly a bit frightened. "Oh, um, thanks?"

"Out of affection," she clarified. "Just—" she paused to punch the air a few times for emphasis. "Knock ye out."

George slowly nodded. He certainly didn't want any punches from Minx, affectionate or otherwise. If Minx really *had* sat down across from him to save him from looking like a friendless loner, the girl had a weird way of showing she cared.

Come to think of it, why *did* she care?

They weren't particularly close. But, well...maybe it was best not to look a gift horse in the mouth. He snickered at the animal metaphor, knowing it was something Schlatt would say.

"What're ye laughin about? You think I'm kidding?!" she spat, her chair flying back as she stood up abruptly. "I'll do it! I'll punch ya right now!"

"N-no! I believe you!" George cried, holding his arms up defensively. "I just wasn't expecting you to be all...nice to me." There was no way George was going to explain the animal metaphor.

Comparing Minx to a barn animal again would be the equivalent of digging his own grave.

Minx's posture relaxed at that. "W-well, if you're gonna laugh at me every time I am, then don't get used to it," she stammered, moving to sit back down. Unfortunately, she forgot that she'd knocked the chair over in her previous physical display, which meant that she landed on the library floor.

George gasped when he saw Minx fall down. "Oh—I'm sorry, a-are you okay?" he stuttered out.

"OW! What're you apologizing for you *moron*, ye didn't do anything!" She yelled, rubbing her back. "Ah, fuckin piece of shit wooden arsehole of a chair! I hope your bitch of a mother was used for fuckin toilet paper, ye cunt! I'd throw you in a fuckin firepit for fuel if I didn't think you'd be so fuckin useless at the job!"

"Uh, wow, okay. I just got here, but *clearly* I'm not invited." Dream snickered, appearing behind George and taking in the sight of Minx cursing furiously on the floor.

"If you're jus' gonna stand there 'n watch me suffer, then maybe ye *should* leave!" she cried angrily as Dream chuckled and offered her a hand.

Minx eyed the proffered hand wearily before taking it. "What a fuckin *gentleman* you are," she groaned, still massaging her back.

"Only the best for a lady like you," he bowed.

Minx rolled her eyes. "Well, I'm *leavin*. Enjoy your fuckin studying or whatever."

When George could no longer hear the sounds of muttered profanities over the din of the library, he huffed and rearranged their table. Dream picked up the offensive chair and took a seat.

"So, do you wanna tell me why Minx was here?" he asked, raising his eyebrow.

"Well, apparently I looked 'embarrassingly lonely' studying by myself. Minx wanted to keep me company, I guess," he shrugged.

Dream snorted. "Right, and I came here to hunt down a dragon."

"That's what she *told* me!" George insisted. "Then she made fun of me for studying, and then..." he trailed off, turning red.

"And then...?" Dream echoed, leaning forward expectantly.

"And then...she said I was cute."

Dream stared at him blankly. "You can't be serious."

"I *am*! She said she wanted to punch me 'out of affection.' What does that even mean?!"

"George," Dream said, snickering and leaning back in his chair. "I-I think she likes you."

"*What*?!"

"Affection punches are reserved for *special* people, George. This is *Minx* we're talking about."

George's cheeks burned impossibly hotter. "Well— w-why would she do *that*?" he stammered.

Dream rolled his eyes and slapped George on the back.

“Why would she like you? Beats me, Gogi. You’re such a *nerd*,” he teased.

“Hey! Don’t call me that!” George snapped, crossing his arms.

Dream smiled at him, then, and George found himself averting his eyes.

“Relax, George,” the Slytherin said. “I’m kidding. You’re a catch.”

In lieu of a response, George crumpled up a piece of parchment and flung it at Dream’s head.

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George had never been happier to board the Hogwarts Express.

It was a relief to be on his way home again after the hell that was exam week. Though Hogwarts was his favorite place in the world, he missed his parents terribly. He was looking forward to spending his summer holiday with his family, surrounded by familiar scents, home cooked meals, and the internet.

Dream, on the other hand, would not stop complaining about having to return home.

“I just think it’s stupid,” he said to George for the fiftieth time on the train. “Why do we need *two whole months* of summer holiday? We already get time off for Christmas *and* Easter. Really, this long of a break is unnecessary.”

“Oh god, Dream, please just shut up,” Sapnap groaned. “We get it, your dad sucks, bla bla bla. If you don’t be quiet I’ll move to Bad’s compartment.”

Dream snorted at the halfhearted threat. “Oh, so you’ll *leave* if I don’t shut up? How is that an incentive for me to be quiet?”

“Whatever! Just. Please. Please stop whining.”

Dream huffed and leaned back in his seat. After a few minutes of silence, George felt something nudge his leg.

“Dream?” he said to the blond, moving his leg away.

“What?”

Figuring the nudge had been an accident, George dropped it. “Never mind,” he replied.

A few seconds later, however, he felt the nudge again.

“*Dream.*”

“Yes, George?”

“Why are you kicking me?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”



George rolled his eyes and pointedly scooted as close as he could to the compartment window, angling his body away from his friend's. Dream stayed put for almost an entire minute before nudging George yet again.

"Stop it!" George huffed exasperatedly, crossing his legs and shooting Dream a look.

"Stop *what*?"

"Stop...putting your thing on mine!"

Dream's expression morphed into a smirk. "But...I like it."

Across from the two friends, Eret groaned.

"Honestly, Dream, what are you, twelve?" the Ravenclaw asked sarcastically, to which Dream nodded.

"Actually, yes. I am."

It was another few hours before the Hogwarts Express finally rolled to a stop at King's Cross. Everyone immediately emptied out of their compartments and hurried to meet their parents. George stood next to Dream on the platform while he waited for his own parents to arrive, occasionally waving goodbye to his friends as they left the station one by one.

It was entertaining to watch the reunions between the students and their families. George saw Techno's mother immediately wrap her son in a warm hug and wave at Wilbur, who was fervently tugging his parents in her direction. Sapnap, meanwhile, was handed an entire gift basket by *his* parents. George even caught sight of Fundy and chuckled when he saw the fox boy's mother fussing over her son's tail.

Eventually, a weird gangly looking house-elf appeared a few meters away from George and began to wave its spindly arms at their group. Dream and Schlatt both bid him goodbye before turning to walk in the elf's direction. Before George could even ask why on earth the two Slytherins would be walking towards a house-elf, however, he heard a voice call out his name.

"George! Are you ready to head home yet?" his father asked, placing a hand on his shoulder and making George jump.

"Dad!" George cried as he whirled around. "I couldn't see you!"

His dad merely chuckled and picked up George's luggage. "Come on, now, let's head to the car. Your mum's waiting for us."

Once he'd hugged both his parents and stowed his trunk away, the three family members settled into their familiar post-Hogwarts discussions in which George told his parents about what he'd done that semester. Apparently, his parents had subscribed to the *Daily Prophet* in order to stay updated on current events in the wizarding world.

"Ruby's been bringing us the paper every day," his mother informed him excitedly, unfolding a copy of that morning's issue. "She's such a smart girl, our Ruby. Speaking of, Georgie, I do hope you feed her after she delivers our letters to you."

"What d'you want me to feed her? Doesn't she eat *live mice*?" George asked, scrunching up his nose in disgust.

His mum waved her hand dismissively. “Mice, insects, voles, rabbits...surely you wizards can conjure her something.”

“I can’t *conjure her a rabbit*, Mum.”

“Can’t you just pull one out of a hat?”

“No!”

“Anyway,” his father said, interrupting their little squabble, “I was meaning to ask you about some of these fancy magic terms we keep reading about. God, it would be so much simpler if we could Google these things. When are you lot going to start using the internet?”

“Dad. Statute of Secrecy, remember? Plus, magic—”

“—interferes with electricity, right, right. Anyway, we saw an advert for something called a *Remembrall*. Do you need one of those?”

“No. It’s just a ball that fills up with red smoke if you’ve forgotten something.”

“Does it tell you what you’ve forgotten?”

“No.”

“Sounds rather idiotic, doesn’t it, Olivia?”

George’s mum hummed in agreement, flipping over the newspaper page. “Yes, that does sound rather pointless. Oh, Georgie, I underlined this word right here. What’s a *squib*?”

George blinked. *Squib*?

“Uh, why do you ask, Mum?”

“Well,” his mother explained, squinting at the tiny print, “this headline here says ‘Squib Rates in Britain on the Rise.’ Is that something we should be worried about? Like a disease or something?”

“Oh, yes,” his father added, “is it like that frightening disease you told us about? The werewolf one? What was it, *licky-trophy*?”

George furrowed his brows and shook his head. “No, Dad, it’s not anything like lycanthropy. A squib is just someone who was born to magical parents, but who can’t do magic.”

“Oh, alright,” his mother said, sounding relieved. “Nothing terrible, then. Now, did you eat on the train? How hungry will you be when we arrive home?”

The conversation reverted back to boring small talk after that. As George watched the colorful London streets pass by outside his window, his thoughts inevitably returned to Dream. The Slytherin was probably already waiting for him at his house.

George smiled at the realization that he was *finally* free from all the stresses of school for two months. No matter how much Dream groaned about having to return home for the summer, George was excited for the break. He would have two whole months of relaxation, lovely weather, and Dream.

What could be better?

## Chapter End Notes

AcCoRdiNg to AO3 stATiStiCs...you should leave kudos and a comment. We're addicted to them. We literally get high off your comments. In all seriousness, though, this story would be nothing without your support, so it really means a lot when y'all leave those comments! Even if they're just one word. We love 'em all.

Gra55 has Tumblr now! They got mad at me for deleting a bunch of their lengthy dialogue so they made a blog to post outtakes. If that interests you at all, check it out: [extragrassydetails.tumblr.com](http://extragrassydetails.tumblr.com)

My (ken's) Tumblr: [kangarooken.tumblr.com](http://kangarooken.tumblr.com)

See you next update!

## Chapter Fifteen || Year Two and a Half (Summer)

### Chapter Summary

Dream's dad has something to share with him.

### Chapter Notes

...and we're back!

Hey, guys. Sorry for the longer wait. It's been a pretty stressful time for both grass and I. I (ken) quit my job! Woohoo! I figured out that full time job + full time college = too much stress.

Went on a writing spree again! Took grass a bit longer to edit, so we hope you enjoy :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream's break was off to a terrible start.

Schlatt went back to giving him the silent treatment as soon as Bippy apparated them to their room. It wasn't a surprise or anything; ever since that fateful winter day, the two Slytherins didn't speak a word to each other when they were alone together.

Dream couldn't blame Schlatt. He had a right to be angry, after all.

Dream didn't even know where to *begin* when it came to repairing their friendship. The first step, he supposed, would be to give the other boy a heartfelt apology. The only problem was that Dream didn't even fully regret betraying Schlatt in the first place. Logically, he knew he was in the wrong and that there was no way to justify his actions, and, yet, he didn't regret what he did.

The obvious relief that George had expressed the second Dream had assured him their other friends were in the clear made it all worth it. Sure, being ignored by his roommate was terrible, but having to watch his best friend live in fear every single day was worse.

Even though Schlatt hated him for it, Dream knew that he would betray his roommate's trust again if he had to. George was his best friend in the whole world, which meant that George had to come first.

That being said, Dream *did* feel guilty. Sometimes he wondered if helping one friend at the expense of another made him a bad person. He wasn't sure.

Perhaps he didn't want to know the answer.

A tense silence settled in the room as the two Slytherins packed their stuff away. Just as Dream finally emptied his trunk, there was a sudden loud crashing noise and Drista came bursting through the door.

“Schlatt!” she exclaimed, oblivious to the tension in the room. The five-year-old tackled the boy in a big bear hug and buried her face in his robes. “I missed you!”

Schlatt smiled and ruffled the girl’s hair affectionately. “Oof! Geez, kid, are ya tryna take me down here?” he asked.

Drista giggled, shaking her head in response.

“Ah, all jokes,” Schlatt said, prying Drista’s hands from around his waist. “How’re you doin’?! Been takin care of the house while we were gone?”

“Yes!” she replied, nodding. “Mom’s always doing ‘paperwork’ all day and Dad’s always out doing grown-up stuff, so *I’m* the one who has to protect our house!”

“Ew,” Schlatt said, making an exaggerated disgusted expression. “Grown-up stuff? Doesn’t that sound awful?”

“Well, Dad said it’s important. But I don’t really care about grown-up stuff,” Drista said with a shrug. “*I* care about chasing out the evil gnomes! They keep trying to steal my toys, Schlatt! They want to eat them!”

Dream snorted and rolled his eyes. “Gnomes don’t care about toys, Drista.”

“How do you know? Are *you* a gnome?” the little girl retorted, sticking her tongue out at her brother.

“Yeah, you tell ‘im, Dris!” Schlatt cheered.

“*No*. I just know that gnomes like to eat worms, so unless you play with *worms*, you don’t have to worry about your stupid toys.”

“Nuh-uh!” Drista protested. “If all they want is worms, why do they always stay near our house?! They could eat worms in the park! They stay in the gardens because they want our things!”

“Ah, don’t waste your time on him, Drista,” Schlatt cut in before Dream could say anything else. “Lemme finish puttin away my things and then we can go gnome hunting, alright?”

The girl glared at her brother for another second before sighing and making her way out of their room. “Okay! I’ll go get our gnome hunting tools!” she called over her shoulder.

It was only after Schlatt had finally finished unpacking his stuff and went to go follow her that Dream realized his own sister hadn’t even said hello to him.

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“Hey Miz Selwyn! The owl brought the mail while Drista ‘n I were hangin outside, so we’re bringin it in!” Schlatt called, strolling into the dining room with Drista at his heels and handing Dream’s mother a stack of letters.

“Oh, they never end, do they?” she sighed, beckoning Bippy over and commanding the elf to put the letters in her study. “Thank you, Jebediah. It was very thoughtful of you to bring them inside.”

“Ah, s’no biggie,” Schlatt shrugged. “Drista got to watch the owl eat a mouse, I got to help ya out. It was a win-win situation!”

“Well, aren’t you the sweetest?” Mrs. Selwyn cooed. “You two should go on and wash your hands. Breakfast is ready, and we don’t want it to get cold, now, do we?”

“Yes ma’am,” Schlatt nodded. “C’mon Drista, to the kitchen!”

Dream stabbed his eggs in irritation as he watched his roommate and sister skip past him. Since when had Schlatt become such a good samaritan? If anyone else from school were to see him like this, they’d think the guy had been poisoned or kidnapped and replaced with some clone. The Schlatt everyone knew from school was like the evil twin of the one who was currently serving himself breakfast in Dream’s home.

Not for the first time, Dream wished Minx were around just so he could hear the guy swear again. It’d only been a few days since Schlatt had started acting all angelic and Dream already couldn’t stand it. To make matters worse, Dream couldn’t even confide in George about the whole situation because doing so would expose Schlatt’s secret.

You’ve already pushed his boundaries once, Dream’s traitorous mind supplied. What’s stopping you from doing it again?

No. Dream wouldn’t tell George about the true nature of Schlatt’s predicament unless he absolutely *had* to.

He would at least *try* to be a decent enough friend to his roommate.

“D’ya need anything from the kitchen, Miz Selwyn?” Schlatt called out.

“No, dear, it’s alright. Leave the errands to the house-elf!” she called back to him before turning to her own son. “What a considerate boy your friend is, Clay. You could learn a thing or two from him.”

Dream narrowed his eyes, “Yeah, sure.”

"Oh don't give me that look," his mother snapped. "You haven't given your sister *nearly* as much attention as he has. That boy is always trying to help out around the house. I thought Bippy would have twice as much work with a guest living here, but instead the elf's work has been cut in half!"

"Doesn't dad *pay* him to do all of this, though?" Dream asked, earning himself a whack on the head. "Ow!"

"*Clay!* Think before you speak! That boy refuses to take anything more from us than the food on his plate and the roof over his head. Whatever allowance your father manages to shove into his selfless hands is all spent on personal necessities. We had to guilt-trip him into accepting new clothing and school supplies, for Merlin's sake!"

Dream rolled his eyes and stood up from the table with a huff. “I’m gonna go,” he said before taking several steps towards the front door.

His mother raised an eyebrow. “And *where* are you going, might I ask?”

Dream crossed his arms defensively. “Out.”

“Why must you teenagers be so cryptic?” Mrs. Selwyn huffed. “I’m only curious, Clay. Are you off to visit that No-Maj friend who lives next door?”

Dream bristled. “No-Maj-born, Mom. And his name’s George.”

“Yes, yes, sorry. Don’t stay out too long. I want you home by lunch,” his mother said, waving him off with her hand.

Dream wasted no time in putting on his shoes and throwing open his front door. As he made his way to George’s house, he felt extra grateful for his Ravenclaw friend’s existence. He didn’t know how he’d stand Schlatt’s presence without George next door to distract him.

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The Slytherin boys were just waking up one July morning when Bippy apparated into their room with a *pop* that had them both nearly jumping out of their beds.

“Master Selwyn requests Mister Schlatt’s presence in the dining room!” the house-elf squeaked, peering at Schlatt with its big bulging eyes.

Schlatt yawned and stretched. When he spoke, his voice was gravelly with sleep. “Did he say why, Bippy?” the Slytherin asked.

Bippy shuffled its feet as it answered. “Master Selwyn said it’s important business, Sir!”

“Alright. I’ll be down in a few minutes.”

Bippy disappeared with another *pop*, leaving Dream and Schlatt alone in their bedroom once more. Dream rolled over and buried his head in his pillow as Schlatt clambered out of bed, rustling sheets and clothing before he finally padded over to the door and slammed it shut.

Dream sighed and flipped over in his bed again, fully intent on falling back asleep, but Bippy’s words kept bouncing around in his head.

*Important business.* What important business could his dad have with a thirteen-year-old kid?

Before he could give the idea much more thought, however, Bippy once again appeared in his bedroom.

“Go away, Bippy. You can make the beds later,” Dream groaned, rolling away from the house-elf and pulling his blanket up over his ears.

“Bippy will make the beds soon, Master Selwyn. But first, Bippy must tell Master Selwyn that Master Selwyn requests Master Selwyn’s presence downstairs as well!”

“Could you cut it out with the ‘Master Selwyn’ crap? I told you not to call me that,” Dream snapped, sitting up against his headboard and shooting the elf before him a glare.

“Bippy is sorry for making Master Selwyn angry! Bippy will throw itself out of Master Selwyn’s window!” the creature squeaked in reply, flattening its ears and staring at the floor.

Dream rolled his eyes at the submissive display. “Ugh, don’t bother. Just tell Dad I’ll be down in a

minute.”

Bippy obediently disappeared moments later, leaving Dream alone to fish a clean set of robes out of his closet. Still somewhat bleary-eyed from sleep, it took him a bit longer than it should have to make himself look presentable. By the time he came downstairs, his father and Schlatt were already sipping mugs of coffee at the dining room table.

“Clay. So kind of you to join us,” his father remarked, gesturing for him to take a seat. Dream did so warily, still unsure why his dad had called both boys downstairs at such an early hour.

“Bippy!” Mr. Selwyn said, summoning the elf to his side instantly. “Fetch my son a cup of black tea. He has yet to appreciate the taste of coffee.”

Bippy did so immediately, and Dream bit back a retort as he accepted the steaming mug from the house-elf’s hands. Somehow, his dad even managed to make his beverage preference sound inferior.

Once all three wizards were settled at the table, Mr. Selwyn cleared his throat.

“Good morning, Gentlemen.”

“Good morning,” the two Slytherins mumbled back.

Pleased with their responses, Mr. Selwyn sat back in his seat and set his empty coffee cup on the table.

“You’re probably wondering why I summoned you downstairs this morning,” he began. “The truth is, I wanted to give you boys an opportunity.”

Dream’s brow furrowed as he puzzled over his dad’s words. “An opportunity? What kind of opportunity?” he blurted out, wincing once he realized he’d spoken out of turn and would likely be scolded in front of Schlatt.

To his surprise, however, his dad didn’t reprimand him for his impatient questions. Instead, Mr. Selwyn *smiled*.

“Ah yes,” he said, regarding his son with something akin to mirth in his gaze. “You’re always so *curious*, Clay. To answer your question, my son, I am going to give you boys an opportunity to accompany me to my place of work today.”

Dream sucked in a quick breath, looking at his father with wide eyes as he processed the words. Out of all the things his father could have dragged him into the kitchen for at eight in the morning, he would never have guessed that *this* would be it. The pondering silence stretched on, broken only by Schlatt releasing a shaky cough.

“Uh, wow, Mister Selwyn, that’s... that’s amazing,” he stammered, kicking Dream’s leg under the table to snap him out of his stupor. “I’ve never been to a...” he trailed off, narrowing his eyes as his sentence lost its direction. He glanced back up at Mr. Selwyn, “Uh, I for— where exactly do you work again, Sir?”

Mr. Selwyn gave the boy an amused look and twirled his wand around in his hand. “My work takes me everywhere, Jebediah.” He mused, “Although, recently, my colleagues and I have been operating out of *Caerphilly*.”

Dream bit his lip, thinking. *Caerphilly*...where had he heard that name before?



Schlatt looked at him expectantly, humming thoughtfully as he waited for Dream's response.

"Oh!" He exclaimed, finally remembering, "That's where the Caerphilly Catapults are from! We saw them in a game when we first came here! Isn't that all the way in Wales, though?"

Dream's dad nodded, pleased. "Indeed it is."

"So...why do you work all the way there?" he asked curiously.

Mr. Selwyn paused and tapped his fingers on the table before answering.

"Clay," he said, "do you remember what my occupation is?"

"Uh...you're a potioneer?"

Dream watched his dad's lips twitch at his response.

"Ah, yes. That is the simple answer I gave you when you were a child," he explained casually.

"Now, however, you are old enough to understand the complex nature of my work. You see, I am a spagyrist."

Again, his father's words were met with puzzled silence.

"Uh...could you remind us what that is, Sir?" Schlatt asked nervously.

"Of course," Mr. Selwyn sighed, "I remember, now, that they don't introduce alchemy at Hogwarts until sixth year. What a pity."

Dream put down his mug and blinked up at his dad. "Wait, you're an alchemist?"

"In short, yes. Spagyric is a branch of alchemy. It is very complex work involving the research and extraction of herbal substances using alchemical procedures," Mr. Selwyn explained.

"Kind of like an herbologist," Schlatt concluded thoughtfully.

Mr. Selwyn stood from his chair, then, and gestured towards the fireplace. "Yes and no. Perhaps it would be easier if I explained things at the facility."

Dream and Schlatt quickly chugged the remnants of their drinks before standing up and following suit, soon forming a little huddle around the hearth.

"Follow my lead," Mr. Selwyn said to the two boys as he turned around and grasped a handful of Floo Powder from the bag on the mantel. He gracefully tossed the glittery powder into the flames, turning the orange fire a pretty emerald green color.

Dream's father stepped fearlessly into the fireplace. "W.A.P. Headquarters," he announced in a clear voice. Immediately, his figure disappeared as the flames swallowed him whole.

Schlatt shrugged and glanced at his roommate. "Mind if I go first?"

Dream shook his head, "Have fun."

Schlatt mimicked Mr. Selwyn's actions, tossing a handful of powder into the fire before taking a step forward and calling out his destination. Soon enough, Dream was alone in the dining room.

"Here goes nothing," he mumbled, reaching for some Floo powder with a shaky hand. Dream had

never liked traveling via the Floo Network; despite knowing that the emerald flames wouldn't actually hurt him, it was hard not to feel panicked when stepping into literal fire.

Eventually, though, he took a deep breath and stepped forward. "W.A.P Headquarters," he declared. The fire roared as the flames consumed him and Dream felt a magical force begin to tug him into the unknown.

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When Dream stepped out of the fireplace, all he saw was white.

White walls. White floors. White lights. He found himself standing in a narrow white hallway with white doors on either side. The setting reminded him of the Florida hospital he'd been rushed to when he'd come down with spattergroit several years prior.

Wait...*was* he in a hospital?

Dream was pulled out of his thoughts when one of the doors up ahead opened with a loud creak, revealing Schlatt's figure standing in the doorway.

"In here, Dream-boat," he called out, beckoning Dream to come closer.

Dream lips quirked up slightly at the old nickname. He ducked his head and followed, noting the clicking sounds his shoes made on the white tile as he walked.

Kind of a creepy workplace, Dad, his brain supplied.

Thankfully, the room in which his father and Schlatt were waiting was a lot less white.

Dream's eyes widened as he took in the sights around him. In contrast to the intimidating colorless surroundings of the first hallway, the interior of *this* room was a hectic mishmash of color.

The first thing he noticed was that there were potions everywhere. Potions on desks, potions on shelves — heck, some potions were even brewing on the *floor*. The sheer number of potion bottles in the room made the dungeon Potions classrooms at Hogwarts look like a pathetic joke.

The only parts of the room that *weren't* covered in potions were inhabited by the most bizzare array of magical creatures Dream had ever seen.

They were lined up in glass cages along the back wall. Some were familiar — like the Jarvey sleeping in one of the cages, facing another which contained what looked like an Erkling. Other creatures, however, gave Dream pause.

Caged in one corner was something resembling an animate red cube with glowing yellow eyes, its body opening up like an accordion as it jumped in place. Beside it was what looked to be a purple box, but as soon as Dream slammed the door shut behind him, its top opened up. A small, pale yellow face peered out, like an irritated, colorless turtle. Its purple shell swiveled closed again as soon as Dream met its gaze.

It took everything in him to resist the childish impulse to run up and press his nose up against the glass.

His father sat down at one of the desks, wordlessly summoning two more chairs with his wand and gesturing for the two boys to sit.

“This,” the wizard said, eyes alight with something Dream couldn’t quite place, “is the extraction room.”

Extraction room. The words sent a shiver up Dream’s spine, though he had no idea why.

“What’s with all the…” Dream trailed off, gesturing around the space as he tried to think of the right words, “...stuff?”

His dad smiled at him and picked up the closest potion bottle. The liquid inside was a bright fuschia color.

“The contents of this bottle, when consumed, give the drinker superhuman strength,” he remarked idly, ignoring the posed question, “If you had to guess, Clay, what would you say were this potion’s ingredients?”

Dream bit his lip as he thought about the question. Strength potions were covered in his second-year Potions class, so he knew the ingredients that the potion *should* have contained. Something was amiss, though; the strength potions that Slughorn showed them in class had all been orange in color, not fuschia.

“Uh...fanged geranium and crushed arm bone?” he replied anyway.

His dad smirked and shook his head.

“That’s what the *old* strength potions contained, Clay. For centuries, spagyrist have been searching for a more efficient, stronger, more *powerful* potion base. And just last month, my son,” his dad broke off to pin him with an unnerving gaze. “I found it.”

Dream gulped and glanced down at the bottle once more, regarding its swirling contents warily.

“...what’s the new base, Dad?” he asked. Schlatt nodded along beside him, seemingly also curious.

Mr. Selwyn smiled. “Wart of Nether.”

Schlatt tensed in his seat, but Dream just stared back at his father blankly. He had no clue what Wart of Nether was, but judging by the way his father said its name it must have been important.

“Jebediah,” his dad said, turning to Schlatt. “If a Muggle were to consume an ordinary strength potion, what would happen?”

Schlatt thought for a few moments before replying.

“Well, uh...they’d just get stronger. The potion would have it’s intended effect, Sir.”

Selwyn nodded, clearly pleased by the response. “Right you are. However, if a Muggle or Squib were to take *this* potion,” Selwyn paused to swirl the contents of the potion bottle for emphasis, “it would kill them instantly.”

Instant death? Dream gulped and regarded the bottled liquid with a newfound curiosity. *That* wasn’t something Professor Slughorn had covered in class.

“You look surprised, Clay,” Dream’s father remarked. “I do not blame you; the properties of Wart of Nether are something alchemists are only beginning to understand. Through my

experimentation, I have deduced that its essence acts as an amplifier; it travels through a being's bloodstream and temporarily enhances magical abilities. Observe."

Selwyn briskly walked up to one of the cages at the bag of the room and unlocked it with a whispered spell. Once the cage was open, he reached in and pulled out a plump, fluffy-feathered bird with pink and blue feathers.

"Is that a Diricawl, Sir?" Schlatt asked, regarding the bird curiously.

Mr. Selwyn nodded and waved his wand, quickly clearing the rest of the potions off the desk before haphazardly dropping the bird onto it. It squawked indignantly and attempted to peck the wizard with its beak.

"The Diricawl is a magical bird, as I'm sure you are aware. It possesses unique apparation abilities that allow it to escape danger when its life is threatened," Dream's dad explained. "Now, observe what occurs when this magical creature is given a few drops of this Netherwart-based potion."

The boys watched as Mr. Selwyn uncorked the potion bottle and grasped the bird's neck with one hand. Without hesitation, the wizard pried open its beak and forced several drops of the fuschia liquid down its throat.

Immediately, the bird began to tremble. When it opened its beak to squawk again, the sound it emitted was deafeningly loud to Dream's ears. Purply-pink particles started appearing around the creature as the potion took effect.

Dream slammed his hands over his ears and swallowed nervously. "Is it—?"

He was cut off abruptly when the Diricawl suddenly locked its eyes on him. In a split second, it propelled itself forward and pecked at his face with enough force to knock him flat on the floor.

He screamed as a potion bottle shattered underneath him, the liquid staining his back as the bird reared its neck and prepared for another attack.

"What the hell's it doing?!" Schlatt yelled, leaping up from his seat and lunging at the creature.

It apparated away in an instant and Schlatt fell to the floor, having missed the creature entirely. Dream scrambled back in a panic, glass crunching underneath him as he looked around frantically for the missing beast.

A screech sounded from behind him and Dream swiveled around just in time to see the bird's beak mere inches away from his face. He rolled to the side at the last second and the attack hit the floor instead, shaking the entire room with soft tremors.

The sudden influx of unnatural strength turned the feathered beast into a terror.

Within seconds, its head was raised again and Dream instinctively reached for his wand, cursing when he realized he didn't have it on him. The stupid magic restrictions for underage wizards were going to get him killed.

"Stupefy!"

A flash of red light hit the Diricawl from the direction of the desk. The bird immediately fell unconscious mere inches away from Dream's feet.

Dream panted heavily, clambering to his feet and nearly stumbling over Schlatt, who was still on

the floor.

His father sighed, waving his wand around to repair the damage the scuffle had caused to his potion bottles. Shards of glass lifted off the floor and Dreams robes, liquid seeping out of the cloth and back into newly reformed bottles. "Remarkable, isn't it?" Selwyn asked, paying no mind to the shaken state of the two boys as he nodded at the bird's limp body.

Schlatt groaned, slowly lifting himself up off the floor. "It's definitely *something*, " he grumbled, rubbing his aching chin.

"Indeed, that is the effect of Wart of Nether. Now, Clay, there is a cage of mice in the other corner. Fetch me one, if you will."

The rush of adrenaline from the excitement was beginning to die down, and Dream's back was noticeably throbbing, but he ignored it. Instead, he obediently made his way to the cage in the corner. Several little white mice squeaked around inside. He gently picked up one of the smaller ones and cradled it in his hands while it looked up at him with beady pink eyes.

"Okay..." Dream muttered, petting the mouse's back softly as he carried it towards his father. "I got one. Now what?"

Selwyn hummed and gestured towards the uncorked potion bottle, somehow still on the table even after all the racket.

"Give it a drop," he commanded.

Dream stiffened and looked up at his dad in disbelief. "You want me to feed it some of *that*? Won't it go all crazy and bite my finger off or something?"

Schlatt coughed and ran a hand through his hair nervously. "The uh... the strength potion's not gonna work on it, man."

"But Schlatt, you saw the Diricawl. It became, like, possessed. I don't want to—"

"Clay," Mr. Selwyn said, a note of warning in his voice. "Do as I said. Give it a drop."

Dream huffed and reached for the potion bottle hesitantly with one hand, still holding the little mouse in the other. He slowly lifted the glass up to the mouse's snout and watched as the rodent gave the bottle's contents a cautious sniff. Immediately, it began to squeak and squirm in Dream's grasp.

Grimacing, Dream tilted the bottle little by little until a single fuschia drop spilled into the mouse's mouth.

The effect was instantaneous. Dream gasped when the creature all at once went limp in his hand. Dream prodded the little rodent with one finger, trying to get it to stir, but he received no response.

Its pink eyes were glazed over. The mouse was dead.

Dream's hands were trembling as he placed the rodent down on the table.

"Wh-why...? What..." Dream stuttered over his words, at a loss for what to say.

The little mouse was *dead*. It was dead, and he'd killed it.

"Oh, calm down, Clay," his father said, placing a hand on his shoulder in what was supposed to be

a soothing gesture. "It was only a mouse. Countless die in the name of progress each and every day."

Dream swiped at his eyes. When had he started crying?

His dad removed his hand and turned to Schlatt.

"Jebediah. The Diricawl survived the potion, but the mouse did not. Explain."

Schlatt straightened in his seat and met Mr. Selwyn's gaze evenly.

"Well, the Diricawl is a magical beast, Sir," the boy answered in a level voice. "You said that Wart of Nether acts as a magical amplifier. The mouse was non-magical, so it didn't *have* any magic to amplify. That's why it died."

Mr. Selwyn gazed at Schlatt with unmistakable pride in his eyes.

"Well done," the wizard said. "You have the makings of a fine spagyrist, Jebediah."

The Slytherin boy beamed at the praise, "Aw, you flatter me, sir," he replied. If Dream didn't know any better, he'd have thought Schlatt was *blushing*.

Dream tore his eyes away from his roommate, gazing at all the potions scattered across the room. Hundreds and hundreds of potion bottles, with a countless number of possible effects. A wave of nausea suddenly gripped his stomach.

"W-why do you need all these potions, Dad?"

Dream's father's lips quirked up at the question.

"I don't," the wizard replied. "No one does. In fact, these potions were developed as a side project of sorts. My discovery pertaining to Wart of Nether will undoubtedly put my name in future history books, but I have devoted myself to a much more noble cause."

Mr. Selwyn paused to look at Dream once more, and Dream was taken aback by the raw intensity suddenly reflected in his father's gaze.

"Clay. My son. I say this not just as your father, but as someone who can recognize a promising young wizard when he sees one. You have so much potential. I brought you here in the hopes that you will help me with my research."

Dream paused, his heart pounding loudly in his chest.

His dad just said he had potential. Not only that, but his dad wanted *his* help.

In spite of the wariness he'd felt when he'd first accompanied his father to Caerphilly, Dream felt a fuzzy warmth spread through his chest at his father's praise.

"You see, boys," Mr. Selwyn continued, "my experimentation has left me with many questions, but the overarching one is this: what is it that allows you and I to wield magic in the first place? What inherited qualities do *we* possess that non-magical people, such as Squibs, do not? In the cases of pureblood Squibs, our blood, like theirs, is pure. So why, then, can they not perform magic?"

Dream's brow furrowed as he contemplated his dad's words. "Uh...bad luck?" he guessed.

Selwyn shook his head. "That's just it. For generations, Squib births have been regarded as

unfortunate tragedies. But what if we could find a cure to the Squib condition?"

Dream chanced a look at Schlatt. The other boy was smiling.

"Think about it," Mr. Selwyn went on. "Squibs in our world live as second-class citizens. Some are so ashamed by their lack of magical abilities that they abandon our world to go live in the Muggle one. And why? Why do so many magical families sit by while their own non-magical children suffer? It's unnecessary!"

Dream had never seen his father so impassioned about anything in his life. The man's face was alight with fiery determination.

"Could you do it?" Dream blurted out. "Do you really think you could find a cure, Dad?"

His father smiled and turned back to look at him and Schlatt.

"Yes, Clay. I think *we* could find a cure. Together."

Against his better judgement, Dream found himself smiling too.

"You two are both promising young wizards of noble descent. I share this knowledge with you in the hopes that you will share my vision. Over the past two years, I have been working closely with an elite team of magical researchers. We have performed several tests on volunteer participants and have seen promising results. I believe we are very close to curing Squibness, and I want both of you by my side when we finally find the cure."

Dream stood, silent and wide eyed, in awe at his father's words.

His father wanted to cure Squibs? Was that even possible?

He's not a good person, Dream. Don't trust him, screamed a voice in the back of his mind.

But he's doing something good, Dream thought back.

It didn't make sense. Why would his father, his *evil, terrible, racist* father, care so passionately about curing something that didn't even affect him?

Dream's father wasn't the selfless type.

Unless...

Was he?

The facts stared Dream in the face. His dad had taken in an orphan out of the goodness of his own heart, had even gone so far as to take it upon himself to search for a cure for Schlatt's affliction. His dad had given the boy clothes and food and even *pocket money*. That wasn't something a bad person would do.

Plus...he wanted Dream to be by his side.

His dad *cared* about him. He wanted Dream's help. He didn't see Dream as a nuisance or disappointment, but as someone *capable*. Someone who could do something great.

"I'll do anything I can to help, Sir." Schlatt declared, snapping Dream out of his thoughts. "This is... this is an *insane* opportunity! I can't even—I never would've— your family has done so much for me, I don't think I'd ever be able to say no to ya."

Selwyn smiled at the boy's words, gazing at him with pride. "Thank you, Jebediah. You may not be a Selwyn by blood or by name, but I already consider you family."

Schlatt blinked in shock at the statement. "Wow, th-thank you, Sir," he choked out, frantically swiping at his eyes that threatened to spill tears of gratitude down his face. "That uh... that means more than you'll ever know."

Mr. Selwyn nodded and turned back to his son. "Dream," he stated, without an ounce of hesitation.

Dream's mouth fell open in shock. His father had *never* used his preferred nickname before.

"I know we have had our disagreements in the past," his dad continued, "but this cure has the potential to help *millions* of people around the world. The Selwyn name will become famous globally. For the *right* reasons. Can I trust you to help me with this research?"

Dream's heart stuttered hopefully in his chest. After several moments, he nodded.

"Of course I will, Dad."

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"You can't be serious, Dream."

Dream had rushed to tell George the news as soon as he'd returned from Caerphilly. Although his dad had told him to keep the quest for a cure a secret, he couldn't *not* tell George.

When it came to keeping secrets, best friends didn't count. Everyone knew that.

But where Dream had expected George to be just as excited about his dad's project as he was, the other boy had simply reacted with a scoff and a dismissive wave.

Dream huffed. "I *am* serious, George. All this time we thought my dad was an evil mastermind, but he's been working nonstop to find a cure for millions of people!"

George rolled his eyes and took another sip from his water bottle.

"Dream, why would a powerful alchemist need a *twelve-year-old's* help?" he asked. "Everyone knows you can't just *give* someone magic. It's something you're born either with or without. Your dad is *obviously* manipulating you."

Dream's brows furrowed at the accusation, "But that's the *thing*, George. No one's really ever tried to cure it before! With my dad's research, we'll actually be able to help Squibs instead of leaving them to live helplessly as second-class citizens!"

George took several steps back and stared at Dream as if the Slytherin boy had suddenly sprouted a second head.

"Are you *high* on something? This is your *dad* we're talking about. The one with the hit list, Dream! The one who didn't want you to be my friend because he thinks my blood is filthy!"



“No, George. We had to have been wrong. Dad hasn’t tried to stop me from hanging out with you once this summer. Besides,” Dream said, “if he really thought non-magical blood was filthy, why would he work so hard to try to cure the Squibs?”

“You say *cure* like there’s something wrong with them, Dream.”

Dream blinked a few times. “Well, yeah. They can’t do magic.”

George shot Dream a look through narrowed eyes.

“Are you saying there’s something wrong with not being able to do magic, Dream? Because my own *parents*—”

“—aren’t related to wizards, Gogi! It’s different. Squibs are born to magical parents, so they *should* be able to perform magic. The fact that they can’t means there’s something wrong with their genetics that we can probably fix.”

George’s expression morphed into the anxious one that Dream hated.

“You...you’re really scaring me, Dream,” the Muggle-born admitted, running a hand through his dark hair nervously.

Dream took several steps towards his friend and placed his hands on the shorter boy’s shoulders.

“Why, though?” he asked. “This is *good news*, George. My dad isn’t the crazy lunatic we thought he was. He’s just an alchemist trying to do good in the world. Whoever wrote the hit list was probably trying to frame him because they *knew* it’d be easy to blame pureblood supremacist crap on my family.”

George averted his eyes.

“By that logic, Dream, I shouldn’t be able to do magic at all since I was born to Muggles,” George murmured. “Does that mean there’s something wrong with me? Does that mean I need to be fixed?”

Dream immediately enveloped his friend in a hug.

“No, no, *no*, George. Don’t be stupid,” he mumbled into his friend’s shoulder. “Of course nothing’s wrong with you.”

Dream let go of his best friend to look him in the eyes.

“Do you know what makes me the most excited about this research, George?” he asked the shorter boy. When George shook his head, Dream continued. “When we figure out how to cure Squibs, we’ll probably be able to give magic to everyone else in the world, too.”

George’s eyes widened. “You mean—”

“*Yes*, George! Magic won’t just be a wizard thing. We’ll probably be able to give magic to all the Muggles, and then the stupid International Statute of Secrecy won’t have to exist anymore. There won’t be any fighting or discrimination because everyone will be equal. Doesn’t that sound amazing?”

Several moments passed in silence while George stared back at Dream through his goggles. Eventually, the Ravenclaw blinked and took a step back.

“I trust you, Dream, but I don’t like this.”

Dream’s face fell.

“I don’t like the idea of you spending all day in a laboratory with your dad. It just...” George trailed off and looked up at Dream helplessly. “It just feels dangerous.”

At that, Dream crossed his arms and rolled his eyes.

“He’s my *dad*, George. He’s finally treating me like I’m an equal. He’s letting me *help him save the world*,” Dream insisted. When George still looked unconvinced, Dream shuffled his feet and said, in a much quieter voice, “He even called me *Dream*. He’s never done that, before.”

George’s eyes softened. A few seconds passed before the other boy took a deep breath and broke the silence.

“Alright. I still don’t like it, but I can see how excited this whole thing is making you,” George acknowledged with a tilt of his head. “If spending more time with your dad makes you happy...then go ahead, Dream. Just *please* don’t do anything stupid.”

“Of course, Gogi. It’ll all turn out great. You’ll see,” Dream reassured his friend.

George reached out one hand to Dream, his pinky outstretched. “Promise?”

Without hesitation, Dream extended his own hand and linked their little fingers firmly.

“I promise.”

~~~~~

July flew by in a blur of morning trips to Wales and afternoons spent with George. Soon enough, Dream’s birthday was right around the corner.

“D’you think you might do anything special this year?” George asked one evening while the boys chatted idly in the park.

Dream hummed thoughtfully, turning his face towards the low-hanging sun. Eventually, the blond shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t know. Probably not. I’ll probably have cake with my family and then hang out with you until I go to bed. You know, the usual.”

George adjusted his white glasses and absentmindedly picked at his nails. “You never seem to want to invite anyone.”

“Who would I invite?”

“Come *on*, Dream. As if you don’t have friends. You could write to Sapnap and he’d come. What about Techno or Wilbur? Eret?”

Dream blew a breath out of his nose and shook his head. "I don't really wanna be a bother."

"A *bother*?" George rolled his eyes. "It's called being a *friend*. What about your Housemates? Schlatt would probably come if you asked him to. Maybe even Minx, depending on how you phrased the invitation—"

George continued to say something about birthday celebrations, but Dream tuned him out at the mention of Schlatt.

After his dad started bringing both of them into work, Dream's relationship with the other boy wasn't nearly as stiff as it had been before. They weren't quite *friends*, per se, but Dream no longer felt like Schlatt hated his guts.

Trust was a fragile thing. Dream knew it would take a while for the long periods of silence between them to not feel awkward. For now, the anger had faded, leaving only lingering resentment and guilt in its wake.

Schlatt might never be his friend again, but Dream had come to terms with that possibility. After all, it was entirely his fault. He just needed to finally take the initiative and apologize like a normal person. Or maybe...maybe if he waited long enough, it'd all work itself out in the end. His dad hadn't just given him an opportunity to save the world, but one to save his friendship.

As the thoughts slowly died down, Dream turned his attention back to George, noticing that the shorter boy was looking at him expectantly, probably having asked Dream a question.

"Uh..." the blond grimaced, searching for something to say. "Y-yeah, sure? Sounds good!"

George groaned and shook his head. "Of course you weren't listening. I swear, sometimes talking to you is like trying to have a conversation with a brick wall."

"Sorry! I was distracted," Dream apologized. "What were you saying?"

"I was *saying* that I probably won't be able to get you a big present this year. My nan is sick and my dad's having problems at his work, so I don't even get pocket money anymore," George confessed with a sigh. "I'm sorry, Dream. I wanted to get you something special."

Dream reached out and ruffled George's dark hair, causing the other boy to let out an annoyed whine.

"You know I don't give a crap about presents, George," Dream said softly, shrugging his shoulders. "To be honest, you could never get me anything ever again and I wouldn't care."

George looked down at his feet. "I know. Still."

Dream's heart broke a little at how *sad* his best friend looked. If there was one thing he hated more than Anxious George, it was Sad George.

"Cheer up, Gogi," Dream said, giving the other boy a nudge. "You're already my birthday present."

George spluttered at the words, his cheeks going bright red. Dream smiled.

Embarrassed George he could handle. Embarrassed George was fun.

"*Dream!* D-don't...you're such a...*ugh*. I hate you," Embarrassed George stammered.

“No you don’t. You *loooooove* me.”

“You’re such an idiot.”

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Dream’s dad bought him a kitten for his birthday.

“I know how much you Hogwarts students love keeping little creatures in your dormitories,” he said as he presented the feline to Dream at breakfast. “I had a toad when I was younger, but your mother seemed convinced you’d like this better.”

Dream stared at the adorable furry bundle in disbelief.

“You mean...I have a cat now?” he asked with wide eyes.

His father nodded and leaned forward to place the creature in Dream’s eager hands. The kitten settled comfortably into his arms, letting out a rumbling purr as he stroked its head. His heart nearly melted as he paused for a moment and the kitten nudged his hand with its nose, beckoning for more scratches.

“Thank you so much,” Dream murmured softly, eyes still trained on his new pet. “Is it a boy or a girl?”

His mother spoke up from across the table to answer his question.

“She’s a little girl,” she said, smiling at the way her son hugged the kitten tight to his chest.

“It’s not fair!” Drista pouted, crossing her arms and huffing in her seat. “I want a kitty, too! Why can’t I have one?”

Schlatt snorted and gave the little girl a pat on the head. “Let’s give it a few years, kid. Learn how to take care of yourself first before tryina raise an animal.”

“But I *can* take care of myself!”

“Says the girl who won’t bathe unless someone forces her into the tub,” Schlatt teased.

Drista’s face went all red. “I don’t like baths,” she grumbled.

“Anyway,” Dream’s mom interrupted, “what will you name her, Clay?”

Dream pursed his lips and considered the kitten for a few moments. She was an interesting mix of color: while she had darker brown tabby stripes, the fur on her back was an assortment of mottled tortoiseshell black and orange. The most endearing thing about her, however, were the fluffy white patches of fur on her chest and tummy along with her four white paws that made it look like she was always wearing socks.

“You could call her Socks,” Schlatt suggested, as if reading Dream’s mind.

*Socks*. It was cute, he supposed, but for whatever reason it didn’t feel quite right.

“I like her little white patches,” Dream said, eyes lighting up as the perfect name came to him. “That’s it! I’ll call her Patches!”

Drista blew a raspberry. “That’s a stupid name. You should call her Princess Fluffy!” the five-year-old exclaimed.

Dream rolled his eyes and tucked the sleeping kitten closer to himself. “No, I like Patches. It’s perfect.”

His father shrugged and reached into the pocket of his robes. Dream watched him pull out a small silk bag and set it on the table.

“Go on. It’s for you,” Mr. Selwyn said.

Dream reached down and picked up the bag curiously. Its contents made small jingling sounds as Dream loosened the drawstring. When he opened it enough to see inside, he gasped.

“Wait, what?” he said, eyes widening in surprise at the gold coins inside the bag. “Is this...how much money is this?”

“Fifteen galleons,” his dad answered.

Schlatt whistled.

“That’s a lotta coin,” he said, nudging Dream with his elbow. “Try not to spend it all in one place, Dreamy.”

Dream swallowed audibly and looked up at his dad, a question in his eyes.

“Are...are you sure? I don’t even know what I’d *spend* all this money on, Dad.”

Mr. Selwyn sat back in his chair and smiled.

“You’re not a child anymore, Clay. You’re thirteen. I trust you not to be foolish with your money. Besides,” Selwyn added, “I consider this lump sum a thank you gift of sorts.”

“You’re thanking *me*? For what?”

Schlatt suddenly grinned and glanced between father and son excitedly.

“Oh, man, he doesn’t know yet!” the Slytherin boy exclaimed, “Tell ‘im, Sir!”

Mr. Selwyn chuckled. “Just two days ago, our little Caerphilly project was approved by the Ministry for official government funding. We’ll be expanding our research, soon.”

Dream’s jaw dropped. “The *Ministry*? You mean the actual Ministry?”

“Indeed. I met with a few representatives in Wales. They agreed that our findings looked promising. We’re getting closer to finding a cure.”

The news filled Dream with a giddy new warm feeling. He suddenly felt an overwhelming urge to sprint outside and tell George immediately. Not wanting to be rude, dipped his head respectfully towards his parents.

“After I get Patches settled upstairs, can I go see George? *Please*?” he asked in the most respectful tone he could muster. To his delight, his father didn’t so much as bat an eye at the request.

"I don't see why not," the wizard said. "Put your birthday money away, first, though. And don't stay out all day."

Dream eagerly sprinted upstairs before his dad had a chance to change his mind.

A kitten, money, *and* drama-free time with George? His father really *had* changed.

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Dream found that the ride to Hogwarts was a lot comfier with a cat snuggled in his lap.

All of his friends had, predictably, fallen in love with Patches. George in particular wouldn't stop asking Dream every five seconds if he could pet her. Though it was a tad inconvenient to have to pass the kitten back and forth what felt like a hundred times, Dream couldn't complain; Patches clearly loved all of the attention.

Once all of the initial excitement of seeing all of their school friends again had passed, their little group of friends settled down in their usual compartment and began the familiar routine of swapping summer stories.

"My parents took us on holiday to Germany again for the first half of the summer," Wilbur shared. "Their friends' daughter was supposed to start at the Durmstrang Institute this year, but my mum convinced them that she'd fit in much better at Hogwarts, so they enrolled her here, instead! You lot will love her, she's very sweet."

"Nah," Sappnap called out. "A first-year? I don't hang out with babies."

Dream snorted and kicked the younger boy in the shin, causing him to yelp.

"You're *twelve*, Sappitus," Dream reminded him. "You can't exactly call the first-years babies."

"You're not the boss of me," Sappnap grumbled, adjusting his bandana.

"Anyway," Eret interrupted, "I read something interesting in the paper last week, Dream. You must've had an eventful summer."

Dream raised an eyebrow at the Ravenclaw's statement. In response, Eret sighed and opened his mouth to elaborate.

"I saw a photo of your dad shaking hands with the Minister for Magic. Something about being promoted to Head Researcher of...something?" Eret explained. "That must've been exciting."

Dream glanced at Schlatt and saw that the other Slytherin was smiling to himself.

"Yeah," Dream replied nonchalantly. "He's been working hard with a bunch of other alchemists. It's pretty cool, I guess."

"Well *I* heard a rumor that he's trying to cure Squibness," Wilbur supplied. Techno, who had begun dozing off on the other side of the train compartment, suddenly perked up at the words.

"*Cure* Squibness?!" he asked incredulously.

Wilbur shrugged. "It's only a rumor. My parents know a lot of people in the Ministry."

Techno huffed and shook his head. "Well, it's stupid. Ya can't *cure* someone if there's nothin' wrong with 'em in the first place."

George nudged Dream in the side, shooting him an *I-told-you-so* look.

"C'mon, he's not *actually* tryin ta do that, right Dream?" Techno asked the blond.

Dream hesitated. He didn't want to fib the truth, but he also didn't know how much of his dad's research was public yet, so he responded with a shrug. "I don't know much about what he's doing," he lied.

"Well, *I* wanna know what the Blade did this summer," Schlatt interrupted, pointedly changing the topic of conversation and nudging Techno's side. "Didja get into any fights or somethin, pal? Looks like you've been avoidin the barber!"

Techno rolled his eyes, nudging Schlatt back and tucking a long strand of brown hair behind his ear. "S just a hassle to go n' cut it all the time. It's just gonna grow back, anyways." He grumbled.

Sapnap snorted. "Wow, look out guys, we've got an edgelord on our hands!"

"Alright, relax. It's just hair, guys." Techno huffed.

Schlatt nodded. "Yeah, sure, nothing wrong with changin up your style from time to time. So, what's the next step? You gonna dye it, too?"

"If he's too lazy to *cut it*, what makes you think he's gonna go and *dye it*?" Dream snickered.

"Well, *he* doesn't need to go dye it," Schlatt winked, miming a flick of his wand.

Techno scooted away from the Slytherin, grimacing at the implications of his words as he held onto his own head. "None of you are gettin' access to my hair. You'll have ta *kill* me for it!"

"Well, now I'm curious. What color *would* you dye your hair, Techno?" Wilbur asked.

Techno furrowed his eyebrows at the roommate sitting beside him, clutching his hair even harder. "Don't go gettin' any ideas, Wil, or I'll dye my *hands* red with your blood."

The entire compartment looked taken aback by the statement, but Wilbur merely chuckled, patting Techno on the shoulder. "I won't, I won't, we haven't even learnt that spell yet!" He assured him.

"Yeah, that's a sixth year spell," Eret confirmed, nodding along.

"Hmmm..." Techno hummed, his shoulders relaxing as he realized his hair was safe. "I dunno, haven't really thought about dyein' it that much, 's not really somethin' I'm plannin' on doin'."

"Wow, does Technoblade not have an answer to something for once?" Schlatt chuckled.

"Pink." Techno declared instantly.

Schlatt blinked at the answer. "Okay, uh, guess he does."

Eret grinned. "Hell yeah, dude, that's a great color!"

"Oh yeah, the ladies I know would *totally* be lookin for a guy with long pink hair." Schlatt

chuckled.

"Hey, there's nothing wrong with guys wearing pink!" Eret declared, "Gender roles are totally overdone."

"Oh, I was bein serious!" Schlatt replied hastily. "I'm not some 'color equals gender' asshole, Minx would probably start *salivating* at a guy with pink hair!"

"Minx? Maybe...I should reconsider." Techno muttered, tugging at his hair nervously.

Dream's dad wasn't brought up for the rest of the train ride, thankfully. Soon enough the friends settled into comfortable silence, broken only by the occasional request to play with Patches.

When the majestic outline of the castle came into view through the window, Dream couldn't help but smile to himself.

This was going to be a great year. He could feel it.

Chapter End Notes

According to AO3 statistics, WE WANT MORE COMMENTS. Please. Kudos and comments make my day. It's a real addiction. We get high off your comments. We read every single one!

Silent readers are the death of fanfiction. If you want us to keep updating, let us know what you thought about this chapter!

My tumblr: kangarookan.tumblr.com

Gra55's tumblr: extragrassydetails.tumblr.com

Chapter Sixteen || Year Three

Chapter Summary

Third year begins.

Chapter Notes

Hello lovely readers! Happy new year!!!

First: THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR COMMENTS! Who knew that shameless begging actually *works*? You guys made me so so so happy :D

grass and I both hope y'all enjoy the update!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Patches spent the entire Sorting Ceremony cuddled in Dream's lap.

At first he thought that the bustling energy of the Great Hall would frighten her, but the kitten remained completely calm as he carried her over to the Slytherin table and took his seat. She didn't even flinch when Minx kicked Schlatt under the table and he called her a cow. Hardly moving when Minx screamed like a banshee in response and tried to launch a fork at Schlatt in retaliation.

Dream smiled as he scratched the kitten under her chin. Patches was *definitely* a special cat.

Once the students were all more or less settled in the Great Hall, McGonagall rose from her seat at the High Table and cleared her throat, preparing to address the crowd.

"Good evening, students."

Murmured greetings swept through the hall as everyone acknowledged their headmistress. McGonagall waited for everyone to quiet down before continuing.

"It is, once again, September first, which means it is the beginning of another academic year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. I hope that all of you had a pleasant break from your studies and wish you all success in your upcoming classes. Now, please give a warm welcome to the entering first-years!"

A smattering of polite applause rose up from the Slytherin table while the rest of the students cheered enthusiastically. Dream watched as the first-years were marched into the Hall and ushered before the sorting hat, which was soon opening its mouth to sing its annual song.

"Is it just me or do these songs get worse and worse each year?" Schlatt grumbled two minutes in.

"It's definitely *you* that's getting worse each year," Minx retorted with an eye roll, earning herself a jab to the ribs.

Before Minx could say or do anything else to Schlatt, the song came to a close and the sounds of applause filled the Hall once more. She huffed and glared daggers at Schlatt as McGonagall proceeded to read out the first-years names for sorting.

“Astelic, Astelica!”

A girl with tanned skin and long brown hair hopped out of the crowd, taking a seat on the rickety stool. While the Sorting Hat contemplated its decision, her eyes scanned the Great Hall, finally resting on the Slytherin table.

As though forgetting that she was seated in front of the entire school, the first-year suddenly sprang up and waved in the direction of the Slytherin third-years. In an instant, the entire student body turned to see what the commotion was about.

The person sitting beside Dream let out a small chuckle, flicking aside his white and black fringe before waving back at the girl.

"Gryffindor!" the sorting hat announced finally, abruptly ending the disruption and leading to the Gryffindor table erupting into whoops and cheers.

"Who the hell was *that*?" asked Schlatt, turning to the third-year quidditch player once the new Gryffindor was seated at her table.

"No idea," GB80 shrugged, though the smirk plastered across his face told another story. "Most likely a fan of mine. I'm really popular on the quidditch field, you know. The kid probably recognized me and just couldn't contain herself."

"Right, and I'm Albus Dumbledore," Minx snorted, rolling her eyes.

GB80 sighed. "Fine. If you *must* know, her name is Astelic and she's actually my long lost sister. We've only just been reunited now, today, thanks to Hogwarts. How crazy is that?"

Dream gave GB80 an amused look. "Right, whenever I meet *my* long lost siblings I wave at them and then go sit somewhere else," he replied, scratching Patches between her ears.

"For some reason, it feels like you guys don't believe me."

The conversation died off as a few more names were called. Eventually a boy named *Green, Samuel* was called up to the Sorting Hat. He was wearing a ridiculous pair of tinted sunglasses that slid too far down his nose as he took his seat on the stool.

When the hat didn't instantly call out his House, he began looking over the Hall as well, a mischievous grin spreading across his face when he spotted the Slytherin table.

With a quick glance at the Gryffindors, *Green, Samuel* leaped from the stool and waved his hands wildly at GB80 just like Astelic had.

The black and white haired third-year looked taken aback when the attention of the entire Great Hall once again fell on him, but he quickly composed himself and waved back.

Before the first-year on the stool could open his mouth to say anything, however, the Sorting Hat declared him a Hufflepuff and sent him running off to the yellow table.

From his spot in the Hall, Dream could see Astelic lean over and smack the Hufflepuff on the head as he walked past her table.

"Okay, and who was *that*?" Schlatt questioned, kicking their roommate under the table. "Your long lost nephew?"

"How'd you guess?" GB80 snickered, avoiding the kick with expert ease. "To be completely honest, though, I actually *don't* know who that guy is. I think he was just making fun of Astelic, and that's always funny."

"That's not very brotherly of you, Gémure-Boye," Schlatt remarked.

"Oh yeah? What do *you* know about being an older brother?" the quidditch player challenged. "I don't remember you saying you have any siblings."

Schlatt paused, glancing at Dream nervously as he pursed his lips in consideration.

Dream looked away. He knew exactly what— or rather *who* — the other boy was thinking of.

"Well, I have a, uh..." Schlatt trailed off, itching the back of his head.

A strange feeling twisted around in Dream's stomach as he watched his roommate struggle to come up with something to say. Memories of Drista running right past Dream and straight into Schlatt's arms flashed through his mind. Memories of his parents praising Schlatt, smiling at him, thanking him for being so kind to their daughter. Memories of Drista laughing, cheering, giving him her favorite toy.

Schlatt's a better brother than you'll ever be.

"He has a little sister," Dream blurted out.

Minx glanced between the two of them as Schlatt's head snapped in Dream's direction and the two boys locked eyes.

His father's words echoed in Dream's head. *You may not be a Selwyn by blood or by name, but I already consider you family.*

"A sister? Huh." GB80 glanced at Schlatt before turning to Dream. "How do *you* know?"

"Maybe if you didn't always ditch us for quidditch, you'd get to know your roommates a little bit," Dream replied with a shrug.

"Oh come on, it's not my fault quidditch is more interesting than you guys," he chuckled. "No offense, but I'd rather take a bludger to the head than stare at a wall and swap stories with you two in our stuffy dorm room."

Minx snorted. "Honestly, this fuckin school probably put us all down in those piece of shit dungeons to suffocate us to death."

"Exactly! I can't stay holed up in some dimly lit room entertaining myself with nothing like some kind of *loser*," GB80 scoffed. "What kind of preparation does that give me for the real world? It's not like when I'm older someone's gonna *pay* to watch me waste time in my room all day. I gotta spend as much time as I can *outside* of the dungeons."

"What idiot would pay to watch you sit in your room all day, anyway?" Dream snickered.

Schlatt grinned. "Hey, who knows? Maybe in some parallel universe we all entertain the masses for a living and do dumb shit while holed up in our rooms for cash."

The other three blinked at him wordlessly for a second before bursting into laughter, garnering angry hushes from their fellow Slytherins.

"What kind of parallel universe is *that*?!" Dream cried.

"Just shut it, will you?" an irritated prefect hissed at them, silencing the third-years.

They turned back to the sorting ceremony just as *Nihachu, Niki* took the stage. The girl had nearly entirely dark hair, save for two blonde strands in the front. A soft smile shone on her face as she caught sight of someone at the Ravenclaw table and gave a small wave. It was far less theatrical than what GB80's fans had done.

"She's fuckin *gorgeous*!" Minx gasped, eyes fixed on the girl as the hat declared her a Hufflepuff.

"I think she's a friend of Wilbur's," Schlatt remarked. "Coulda sworn I saw photos of her in their albums last time I hung out at his place. That was years ago, though, so don't quote me on it."

"That bastard's fuckin dead if he doesn't introduce me to her the first chance he gets."

"Minx, you might just be the last person in this entire fuckin school that Wilbur would want to introduce to his first-year Hufflepuff friend," Schlatt chuckled.

Minx glared at him, considering the silver utensils in front of her for a second before opting to kick him under the table.

Thankfully, the ceremony was nearly over by that point, so the prefects didn't need to waste any time in coming to quiet them down again. McGonagall soon ended her speech and waved her arms, causing food to materialize in front of the students on cue.

The third-years glanced at the food for a moment before sharing a knowing look. Months spent eating Ravenclaw food in the past only enhanced the mediocrity of the Slytherin meals, and all four of them knew there was no way they'd be staying at the green table for the best meal of the year.

Schlatt and Minx hardly waited another second before standing up from the bench and sprinting towards the Ravenclaws, leaving Dream and GB80 behind.

"So...I guess we're eating with Ravenclaw today," Dream said, pulling away from his seat as well.

"Nah, you guys can go ahead. I have a long lost sister to reconnect with. And apparently a nephew," the quidditch player snickered, waving him off.

Dream paused, crossing his arms. "Who is she *really*?" he asked.

"Family friend, her mom's a quidditch pro and her dad's a coach." GB80 shrugged. "My parents made me promise to babysit her when she got here, so it looks like I'll have a new seating arrangement from now on."

"That...sucks?"

"Eh, could be worse. Could still be hanging out with you guys."

Dream chuckled, shaking his head as he turned towards their friend group. "I'd sleep with one eye open if I were you, Gémure-Boye!" he called over his shoulder, stepping into the din of the crowd before his roommate could shoot back a retort.

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Overall, the first month of third year had been quite pleasant for George.

What made the start of this school year so exciting was that he finally got to choose his own elective subjects. Unfortunately, since Muggle Studies had been made mandatory, he'd only gotten to pick two additional classes. The choice had been difficult, but in the end he'd selected Arithmancy and Ancient Runes.

When he first told Dream about his selection, the other boy had groaned and called him a boring nerd for not choosing the more exciting Care of Magical Creatures class or the legendarily bizarre Divination class. George stood by his decisions, however. He'd always loved maths, so when he found out that there was an entire class devoted to studying the magical properties of numbers, he instantly knew he had to take it.

As for Ancient Runes, well...it was a class he felt like he had to take for less pleasant reasons.

"You know," George said to Dream one morning during breakfast, "I still can't believe you called me a nerd for choosing Arithmancy and Ancient Runes, then proceeded to select the *exact same subjects*."

Dream shrugged and shoved a spoonful of oatmeal into his mouth.

"Yeah, Dream-boat," Schlatt chimed in from a few seats over, "how could you pass up the opportunity to take Divination? I mean, talk about an easy grade."

"Hey! I quite like Divination," Wilbur protested. "I found our Tessomancy introduction fascinating. Who would have thought that tea leaves can unlock the future?"

Schlatt and Minx shared an amused look.

"Whaddya see in mine, then, Mr. Seer?" Schlatt snorted, passing his empty mug to the eager Ravenclaw boy.

Wilbur's face screwed up in concentration as he assessed the dregs of Schlatt's drink. Suddenly, his eyes widened and he broke into a grin.

"Oh, Schlatt, it's wonderful! It looks like a little sun! That means you'll experience great happiness!"

Schlatt snorted. "Oh, yeah?"

"Yes! And here—oh. Well, now that it's upside down, it looks a bit like a skull, which means there's danger in your path. Hmm..."

"Aww, darn. Keep lookin', Wil, you'll find something."

Wilbur's concentration was broken, however, when a large barn owl abruptly flew over his head and dropped an envelope right into the empty tea mug.

"Oh, bloody hell!" Wilbur exclaimed, picking the letter out of the cup. "There go my predictions."

"You'll get 'em next time," Schlatt reassured him, patting his arm sympathetically.

Eret nudged Wilbur in the side and peered over his shoulder curiously.

“Who’s the letter from?” he asked.

Wilbur glanced at the envelope briefly before opening it. “My mum,” he said as he withdrew and unfolded the envelope’s contents. His eyes scanned the piece of paper for several seconds before he threw the thing on the table and groaned.

“What happened?” Eret questioned. Wilbur merely grunted and gestured to the letter, which Eret reluctantly picked up and began to read.

“*Dear Wil,*” he read, clearing his throat. “*Tommy came ‘round again yesterday and asked me for your school’s address. I told him it’d be easier for me to pass his message along, so enclosed you will find his letter. Love, Mum. Who’s Tommy?*”

Techno, who had been silent up until that point, let out a chuckle. “Wait, Tommy? That Muggle kid who moved in next door to you three months ago?” he asked, amused.

“Yes,” Wilbur sighed, “*that* Tommy.”

Techno snickered, “Alright, I have to see this, pass me that letter, Eret,” he waved a hand towards the paper while the other table members looked on in confusion. Once the letter was in his hands, Techno squinted at the print and began to read.

“*Dear Big Man Wilbur,*” he began in his trademark monotone, “*you said you were going to school in Scotland but your mum will not tell me where. Please tell me where. I need your help because a girl in my class fancies me and you are an expert at women and women are scary. My mum says I am too young to have a girlfriend but I will be eleven in April so that means I can probably get married soon. Anyways, please come back to Nottingham. From, Big T.*”

Every single person at the table was cracking up by the time Techno finished reading.

“Did you just receive *fan mail*, Wil?” George asked with a grin.

“More importantly, since when are you ‘an expert at women’?” Dream questioned teasingly.

Wilbur muttered something under his breath and snatched the letter back from Technoblade.

“I can’t believe Tommy ruined my reading! The bugger’s not even here!” He cried, scanning the paper to make sure Technoblade hadn’t made up any of it. With a huff, he crumpled up the paper and stuffed it into his robe pocket, “How the *fuck* does he manage to bother me without even being here physically?! This is what I get for being polite to new neighbors. I’m never helping someone move into a new house ever again.”

“That’s probably for the best. You almost broke the statute of secrecy *and* the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery because the boxes were too heavy for you,” Techno snickered, earning himself a glare from Wilbur.

“Well at least I helped more than *you*! You just sat there while I worked my arse off!”

“Hey, I never agreed on doing any heavy liftin’. I came over, tryin’ to be all nice n sociable n not sufferin’ from a vitamin D deficiency, and then a movin’ truck pulls up on your block outta nowhere!”

“It would’ve been incredibly rude not to help after seeing them all work so hard,” Wilbur huffed.

"Well technically I *was* helpin, just not physically."

"What the hell were you doin then?" Schlatt asked.

"I was babysittin'."

Wilbur's eyes widened. "Wh— *sitting on the child* does not count as 'babysitting'!" he spluttered.

Technoblade rolled his eyes. "He's a baby. I was sittin' on him. It's in the name."

"You could have killed him!"

"Psh, nah," he waved off Wilbur's concern with his hand. "He was havin' the time of his life."

"He was *crying*!"

"Those were tears of joy."

Wilbur sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Techno, he told his mum he wanted to file a bloody restraining order against you."

"In America, going to court is a love language."

Eret chuckled, "Last time I checked, this was the UK."

"Yeah! Over here when a child drinks our lemonade we aren't allowed to pin them to the ground and sit on them!" Wilbur exclaimed.

"Wilbur, it was a thousand degrees outside, alright? He drank my lemonade, my only source of hydration for miles. I could've died! I drop-kicked that child in *self defense*! Who knows what other damage he could've done if I hadn't stopped him?!"

"You're a lucky bastard, you know that, Technoblade? Only you would manage to beat up a ten-year-old and have it coincidentally be the most dramatic ten-year-old in existence so his mum didn't believe him when he cried attempted murder."

"I plead the fifth."

"Your constitution doesn't apply here!"

Techno furrowed his eyebrows and sighed. "I never shoulda let you read my American History textbooks."

"They were actually quite fascinating," Wilbur remarked, straying away from the original conversation. "You know, I rather liked that Hamilton fellow."

"He was a slave owner, Wil."

"Oh." Wilbur blinked in surprise. "Well that's... unfortunate. It didn't say that in your textbook."

Techno snickered. "Say hello to the American education system."

Wilbur stared blankly at the table, letting out a deep breath through his nostrils. He seemed to be deep in thought.

"There there," Techno patted his shoulder awkwardly. "I'll uh... I'll let you borrow a really nice

pen to write back to Tommy about his... women problems."

"Do you think I should mention you in the letter?"

"Uh, unless Tommy's suddenly gotten really cool, really quickly about the 'babysittin' and the chalk I stole from him and the favorite shirt I made fun of him for... I wouldn't. He'd probably get his hands on a howler through sheer willpower and send it your way."

"Yeah, he probably would," Wilbur chuckled. "I reckon the last thing this school needs is his voice echoing throughout the Great Hall."

"Wilbur, please. Don't even joke about that."

Wilbur sighed, turning away from the group to stare off into the dining hall contemplatively. All of a sudden, his eyes lit up as he spotted someone approaching their table. George turned his head and spotted Bad walking towards them with a timid-looking first-year girl trailing behind him.

"Niki!" he called out excitedly, waving the younger girl over. "There you are! I haven't seen you since the school year started!"

The girl tucked a bleached strand of hair behind her hair and shrugged sheepishly. Bad put a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"This little muffin said she was scared she wasn't allowed to visit other tables," the older Hufflepuff explained.

Wilbur snorted and gestured to the Slytherins sitting among the Ravenclaws. "Oh, you needn't worry about that, Niki. Our prefects let us get away with House-mixing."

"Yeah," Eret added, "Philza's the best. I wish all prefects were that cool."

"That's *Head Boy* to you," Techno corrected, rolling his eyes.

"Right, of course, of course."

Niki giggled. "I didn't really want to interrupt your friends, either. You guys always look like you're talking about really important things."

Techno snorted. "Just the other day Schlatt bet Minx that she could fit her entire fist in her mouth. I really don't think we're havin' any intellectual conversations here."

"Shut the *fuuuu*— rick up! That did *not* happen!" Minx protested, slamming her fist on the table as she glanced at Niki nervously.

"You really shouldn't have taken the bet, Minx. That loss was embarrassing," Wilbur chuckled.

"You can fit your whole fist in your mouth?" Niki asked in her German lilt, tilting her head in question.

"*No!*" Minx cried, at the exact same moment that Schlatt said "Yeah! Show her, Minx!"

"Stop it! I don't fuckin shove any fists in my mouth, okay?!"

"Language!" Bad chided.

"We all saw it, Minx!" Schlatt exclaimed.



Wilbur patted the seat beside him as the two Slytherins continued to bicker. Niki smiled, stepping around the table to take the spot.

As everyone else settled into their own conversations— or arguments— Bad caught Dream and George’s attention by slapping a copy of the *Daily Prophet* on the table in front of them and pointing to the front page.

“Well, well, well!” he chuckled, “Would you take a look at that?”

“You’re actually subscribed to a *newspaper*? I thought you were fourteen, not forty,” Dream snorted.

“Ha, *ha*. Just look at the headline, you muffinhead!”

George peered at the paper over Dream’s shoulder, heart sinking when he caught sight of the headline.

*Wizarding Advancement Project: New Hope for Wizardkind?* read the text in bold red font. Beneath the headline was a photograph of none other than Dream’s father in what looked to be a laboratory of sorts, surrounded by various cauldrons and potion bottles. George watched as the man in the photograph gave one of the cauldrons a little stir with his wand before smiling triumphantly at the camera.

Dream looked surprised for half a second before his expression morphed into one of nonchalance.

“Oh, yeah,” the Slytherin boy said with a shrug. “My dad’s an alchemist.”

“He’s not *just* an alchemist!” Bad pointed out. “He’s the Head Researcher of the W.A.P.!”

Eret broke off from his conversation with Niki and Wilbur to stare at Bad perplexedly.

“What’s the W.A.P.?” he asked.

Bad adjusted his glasses on his nose and squinted to skim over the article. “It’s a...research project? A charity, maybe? It says here that they’re trying to find cures to ‘illnesses that have plagued wizardkind for millenia using new alchemical breakthroughs,’ whatever that means.”

Technoblade’s eyes narrowed at the older Hufflepuff’s words. “Lemme see that,” he demanded, holding out his hand and taking the newspaper from Bad.

“According to *Clay Selwyn II, the W.A.P.’s Head Researcher*,” Techno read, “*New advancements in the field of spagyric may lead to groundbreaking new treatments for illnesses such as Scrofungulus, Lycanthropy, and Squibness?!* ” he exclaimed, throwing the paper back down on the table. “I mean, Scrofungulus and Lycanthropy I get, but *Squibness*? C’mon, Dream!”

Dream glanced at the article hesitantly, “Well, how is Squibness any different than those other two?”

“Because it’s *not* an illness.”

“How isn’t it an illness?! If someone is born to two wizards, shouldn’t they logically have magic? Magic plus magic equals magic!” Dream protested.

“By *that* logic, no magic plus no magic should equal no magic. Is that what you’re implyin’ here? Does a wizard born to two non-magical parents *also* have an illness? Do they *also* need to be

cured?" Techno challenged, raising his eyebrow.

Dream paused, pursing his lips together in thought. George stared at his best friend, locking eyes with him as Dream looked back up.

"No, of course not," he said decidedly.

"Then it isn't any different for Squibs," Techno concluded.

Perhaps sensing George's discomfort, Dream let the matter rest. However, conversation at the table remained tense after that.

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By the time October was well under way, George was scoring *Outstandings* in most of his classes. It wasn't particularly difficult for him to score high marks when he found the material interesting, and when it came to magic, George found *all* of it interesting.

D.A.D.A. was no exception. George quite enjoyed learning about all of the various dark creatures that inhabited the world around him. Learning about how to dispel dark forces gave him a certain sense of security.

"Your homework on the practical defensive uses of the Seize and Pull Charm is due next Wednesday," Professor Travers reminded the third-years at the end of one of their Friday lessons.

Dream rolled his eyes and nudged George with his elbow.

"Can I copy your notes later?" the Slytherin asked.

"I don't understand why you refuse to take your own," George huffed.

"I'm lazy. Duh."

Their conversation was interrupted by their professor, who stepped in front of Dream's desk to catch his attention.

"Dream," she began, "I haven't seen your father in a while, but do pass along my congratulations next time you write to him. I know how long he's been waiting to have his research recognized by the Ministry."

George had to stop himself from rolling his eyes at Professor Travers' words. Ever since the start of the school year it seemed like everyone felt obligated to congratulate Dream on his father's new research project, and George was growing tired of having their conversations interrupted by pointless praise.

"Thanks, Aurora. I'll let him know," Dream replied politely.

Techno, who was putting his books away behind them, overheard the exchange and muttered something under his breath, causing the professor's eyes to snap in his direction.

"Yes, Mr. Technoblade?" she asked, raising a single eyebrow.

Techno's expression was deadpan. "I jus' think the Ministry shouldn't bother recognizin' pointless work. Curin' Squibness is one of the stupidest ideas I've ever heard, Professor."

George put his head in his hands and groaned.

Not this argument again.

"But, Mr. Technoblade," Professor Travers insisted, "we live in a new age of discovery. Soon, Squibness will be but a relic of the past. Think of how many people will benefit from the cure! It truly is marvelous," she sighed wistfully.

Technoblade snorted and shot her a disbelieving look.

"Ma'am, you can't cure someone who isn't sick," he said flatly. Beside him, Eret nodded.

"Yes, isn't that quite...rude, in a way, Professor? To see lack of magic as something to be cured?" he asked nervously.

Professor Travers paused, seemingly considering the question.

"Mr. Eretson," she finally said, "would it be 'rude' to offer sight to a blind man?"

Eret looked like a deer caught in the headlights, afraid to make the wrong move.

"Erm...no?" he offered, his voice cracking on the word.

The professor hummed and tilted her head. "And why not?"

"...Because you would be improving his quality of life. He'd be able to see things and be more independent and..." Eret trailed off, glancing nervously at those around him, "and...yeah."

"Then *how*," Professor Travers asked, "is offering Squibs magic any different?"

Techno leaned forward a bit in his seat. "*Because*," he said, "Squibs have a fine quality of life. Billions of people live long, fulfilling lives without magic. You don't hafta—"

"Don't blind people live long, fulfilling lives?" the Professor interrupted. "I'm sure most do. The fact, however, remains that blindness is a disability. If a child is born blind, we try to cure the child's blindness. If a child is born a Squib, it's only common sense that we should try to cure the child's Squibness."

The room filled with whispers as the students processed their professor's words.

"Ooh, she got you there, Techno," Schlatt grinned. "The Blade just got *owned*."

Techno closed his eyes and gritted his teeth. "No," he grunted, "I did not get *owned*. This is all complete nonsense. You can't go around talkin' about this stuff like it's—"

The bell sounded just then, cutting Techno off mid-sentence. The conversation came to an abrupt end as students hurried to collect their belongings and head off to their next classes. George would have been lying if he said he wasn't relieved the discussion was over.

Or, it *would* have been over if Dream hadn't decided to bring it up again just minutes later as they were walking down the hall together.

"She *did* make a point, though," the Slytherin said.

George scoffed and crossed his arms. “What, where she compared Squibness to blindness? That was such rubbish, Dream, come on.”

“I don’t get why people are so uptight about it,” Dream stated. “It’s not like my dad’s trying to start another Wizarding war. His organization is *helping* people.”

“The people don’t *need* help!” George exclaimed. “Squibs shouldn’t have to be *given magic* in order to be accepted into society, society should change its backwards attitudes.”

“It’s not backwards to want to help people. It’s like Aurora said: we live in a new age of discovery. Curing Squibness seems impossible to us now, but as we make more progress—”

“Excuse me,” a female voice interrupted from behind them, “what’s this I hear about curing Squibness?”

The boys turned around, surprised, and met the questioning gaze of Professor Borealis.

“Oh, hello, Professor,” George said politely, dipping his head in greeting.

“Hello, Mr. Davidson. Mr. Selwyn,” she replied. “Which class did you two have just now?”

Dream and George shared a look before Dream coughed out a reply.

“Defense Against the Dark Arts,” he said.

Professor Borealis pursed her lips, her eyes narrowing. “With Professor Travers, you said?”

“Um...yeah.”

“And she told your class that we will be able to ‘cure’ Squibness?”

George was quiet. *How many times in one day did people need to have the same argument?* he thought to himself, frustrated. Dream just nodded in response to the professor’s question.

“Well,” Professor Borealis finally said, straightening up and smoothing her robes, “we have our next Muggle Studies lesson on Tuesday, if I am not mistaken.... I suppose I will have to rework my schedule a bit to correct these dangerous ideologies then.”

George looked at his professor hopefully. *Dangerous ideologies?*

“Run along, you two. I would hate to make you late for class,” the professor said dismissively before turning on her heel and vanishing down the corridor while George and Dream looked on curiously.

“Well that was...” Dream began, but George cut him off with a shake of his head.

“*Please* can we just go to Arithmancy?” he asked, voice a tad desperate. Thankfully, Dream didn’t push any more conversation as they made their way to their next class.

George hoped that whatever conversations their other professors had planned would not involve any more talk of Squibness and Dream’s dad. It wasn’t even noon and George already felt exhausted.

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The first Hogsmeade visit of the year happened two weeks into November.

“Here’s the plan,” Dream said to George on the morning of the trip as the third-years waited eagerly in the Great Hall. “First, we hit up Weasley & Weasley. Then, we—”

“Wait, the joke shop? I thought that was in Diagon Alley.”

Dream huffed. “Yeah, Gogi, they have another branch in Hogsmeade. Just shut up and listen!”

George rolled his eyes. “Okay, okay, go on. We go to the joke shop. Then?”

“*Then* we’re gonna head to Honeydukes and grab one of everything they have. After that, we’re gonna check out Spintwishes Sporting Needs to just have a look at things, and *then* we’ll grab butterbeers at the Three Broomsticks before finishing up with a visit to the Shrieking Shack.”

George shuffled his feet and ran a hand through his hair. “Dream...that sounds lovely, but...”

Dream raised an eyebrow. “But what? Please tell me you don’t want to go to Madam Puddifoot’s or something.”

“What? No,” George replied hastily. “It’s just...I don’t get pocket money anymore. This...this all sounds so expensive. I can probably pay for a butterbeer, but I won’t be able to buy much else.”

Dream looked at George like he’d gone crazy. “You...you’re worried about *money*?”

George’s face went bright red. “It’s not a big fuss or anything, I can just go with you to the shops and help you pick stuff out—”

“George!” Dream interrupted. “Don’t be stupid. I *have* money.”

“I’m not just going to *take your money*, Dream.”

“You wouldn’t be taking it, I’d be *giving* it to you. You know what? Here,” the Slytherin said, reaching a hand into his robe pocket and pulling out a small silk bag. “Open your hand.”

Puzzled, George outstretched his left palm and waited. Dream proceeded to unceremoniously dump half of the bag’s contents into George’s hand with a grin.

George was stunned. Dream had given him literal gold.

“Dream!” he exclaimed, trying to hand the gold pieces back. “Blimey, Dream, how much money is this? Take it back!”

Dream rolled his eyes. “Relax, it’s just some of my birthday money. I only gave you, like, five galleons.”

“Wh—!? *Five galleons*?! Dream! That’s like, ninety quid!”

“What’s a quid?”

“It’s another word for— you know what? It doesn’t matter, you idiot, just take the money back!”

Before George could forcibly shove the coins down Dream's robes, Professor Hagrid cleared his throat to catch everyone's attention.

"Third-years! We'll be off ter Hogsmeade now, so gather 'round!" the half-giant bellowed.

Dream shot George a triumphant grin before scampering off to the front of the group. George grumbled and shoved the five gold coins into his pocket, fully intent on returning them later.

Soon the group of excited students was pressing forward, following Hagrid out onto the Hogwarts grounds and towards the castle's main gates. George fell into step beside Wilbur and Eret, both of whom looked just as thrilled as George felt.

The group eventually stepped outside the large gates and began the trek through the Scottish hillside. It was cold, the air heavy with the promise of the first winter snow. George tucked his chin into his blue and bronze scarf, thankful for the slight warmth it provided him.

After about a ten-minute walk down a winding path, the students saw familiar cottages begin to pop up in the distance. George could see that several older students were already walking up and down the cobblestone streets of the village, chatting and laughing together in small groups.

"Everybody, stop and listen!" Hagrid announced, raising his hand and stopping a little ways away from the start of High Street. The third-years obediently quieted down and stared up at the professor with wide eyes.

"Since it's yer first time here, I need to tell ye the rules," Hagrid explained. "The most important one is this: no stayin' out past curfew! Anyone caught outside the gates will face severe consequences."

George eyed Dream in his peripheral vision and noted that the Slytherin had a mischievous smile on his face.

"Other than that," the professor continued, "I don't have much else to say ter ye. No leavin' the village bounds. Any contraband ye purchase here can't be brought back to the castle. Keep yer wits about ye."

George nodded along with everyone else impatiently, only half listening to Hagrid's speech. Like all the other third-years, he was much too excited to pay attention to lengthy lists of rules.

"Alright, run along. Go have fun. But be back by ten!" Hagrid finally concluded. The students immediately split off into their various friend groups and headed into the village.

"Are you guys coming to Weasley's?" Dream asked Eret, Wilbur, and Techno as the group made their way downtown, walking fast.

"No," Wilbur replied, "we're stopping by Scrivenshaft's."

Dream quirked an eyebrow. "The quill shop?"

"Yes. The quill shop. Because we need *more* stationery, apparently," Techno deadpanned.

"We have to spread the word, Techno!" Wilbur exclaimed. "I must tell Mr. Scrivenshaft about the Paperchase! He's probably never even *seen* a pen before, the poor lad!"

George chuckled at his roommate's antics. Dream just shrugged and waved the group of Ravenclaw boys goodbye before turning back to George, Schlatt, and Minx.

“Anyone remember where the place is? I haven’t been to Hogsmeade in forever.”

Thankfully, Minx seemed to know the layout of the village by heart. They soon found themselves standing in front of a very colorful building that looked out of place among the other quaint village shops and houses. Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes was bustling with activity; even a few Hogwarts staff members could be seen inside, perusing the store’s wares.

“Let’s go!” Dream cheered, wasting no time in throwing the shop’s doors open and ducking inside. Schlatt and Minx followed eagerly, but George suddenly found himself unable to move.

Because there, pinned to the wall of the joke shop, was a poster that made George freeze in his tracks.

*We need YOU to join the cause! proclaimed the poster in big bold letters. Together we CAN cure Squibness! Stop by J. Pippin's Potions to donate a blood sample today. Brought to you by the Wizarding Advancement Project.*

He felt like it had to be a joke. Even on what was supposed to be a carefree Hogsmeade weekend, the stupid W.A.P. wouldn’t leave him alone.

Suddenly overcome with anger, George reached forward and yanked the paper from the wall, hurriedly crumpling it into a tiny ball and chucking it into a nearby rubbish bin. He refused to think about idiotic blood statuses or Squib cures on his first weekend out with his friends.

When George finally ducked into the busy shop, he spotted Dream staring at a display in the back and quickly walked up to his oblivious best friend.

“Ha! Look at this,” Dream said, pointing to a sign at the back of the store advertising instant love potions.

George scoffed at the display. “Why would they *sell* those?”

“To prank your crush. Duh.”

“Yeah, but *forcing* someone to fall in love with you by *drugging* them?”

“It’s not real love, it’s just a temporary infatuation. It’s supposed to be funny, Gogi.”

“I dunno...” George said, eyeing the cute little potion bottles suspiciously. “Seems pretty...rapey.”

“You think if I feed you one you’ll finally admit that you love me?” Dream asked, picking up a bottle and swishing the liquid around contemplatively.

George took several steps back from his friend. “Don’t get any ideas,” he warned.

“C’mon, George,” Dream teased. “Just say you love me. We all know it’s true.”

George felt his face heating up. “Put the bottle down, you idiot.”

“Alright, alright,” Dream conceded, setting the bottle down with a smirk. “I’m not gonna *drug* you. I don’t need a love potion to get you to fall for me, anyway.”

They spent almost half an hour in the store perusing all of the various items. Dream purchased a variety of random gadgets for himself, but George still refused to spend a single sickle of his best friend’s money. After paying at the till, the two boys waited outside the shop for Schlatt and Minx to finish checking out.

They didn't have to wait long. Dream's two Housemates soon approached them outside with smiles on their faces and numerous shopping bags in their hands.

"Hey, Dream-boat, check this out!" Schlatt said, handing a corked vial of something to Dream. George could see that the liquid inside was a pretty cyan color.

"What is it?" Dream asked, giving the vial a closer look.

"It's a cool thing Minx found in the back of the store. If you drink it, it makes your arms and legs invisible for a few minutes."

Minx nodded and tipped back an identical looking vial. After several seconds, her entire body apart from her head seemed to vanish into thin air. The sight was terrifying.

"It's called Missing Body Mixture!" her floating head exclaimed.

Dream's eyes lit up. "That's *so* cool! Lemme try!"

Without further hesitation, Dream lifted the vial to his lips and swallowed the whole thing in one gulp. The other third-years eagerly waited for the blond's body to vanish just like Minx's had, but several seconds passed where nothing happened.

"Huh," Schlatt said. "Maybe that one was a dud. I got a bunch, lemme—"

He was cut off abruptly when Dream doubled over and proceeded to empty the contents of his stomach right there in the street.

"*Dream!*" George cried, stepping away from the mess of blue bile by Dream's feet.

"I just—" Dream couldn't get the words out through another awful retch.

"Dream, Buddy, let's maybe find a professor or something," Schlatt suggested nervously, glancing around for an adult who could perhaps help them out.

Dream kept heaving onto the cobblestones, and George noted with alarm that the other boy's neck was beginning to break out in hives.

"Help!" Minx's floating head cried. Luckily, Professor Hagrid overheard the commotion and quickly ran up to the group, grimacing when he saw Dream's predicament.

"Oh, my. E'ryone stay calm!" he said, scooping Dream up effortlessly in his arms. "I'll be takin this one back now. Jus' go about yer day!"

George didn't think twice before following Hagrid as the half-giant turned to go back to the castle. Schlatt reached out and put a hand on his shoulder.

"George?" he asked. "You goin' back so soon?"

George balked at the question. "Dream is *ill*! Of course I'm going back."

"Are ya sure? I'm sure Dream wouldn't mind if you grabbed a butterbeer with us. He'd want you to have fun," the Slytherin said with a shrug.

"What?! No! I have to go to Dream," George insisted before turning on his heel and running after Hagrid's quickly disappearing form.



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“The poor boy’s allergic to tarantula eyes,” Madame Abbott said with a sigh. “They’re a staple of invisibility potions.”

“But he’s alright?” George asked from his seat by the entrance of the Hospital Wing. He’d wanted to sit at Dream’s bedside, but the Matron had told him that he’d only get in her way. Madame Abbott smiled reassuringly and patted the Ravenclaw boy on the head.

“Yes, dear,” she answered. “It’s nothing I haven’t seen before. Your friend will be right as rain in a few hours, but he needs to read labels more carefully from now on.”

The Matron turned her back on George to go check on something else, but George quickly reached out a hand and tugged on the back of her apron.

“May I sit with him now?” he asked pleadingly.

“Goodness, Mr. Davidson,” Madame Abbott exclaimed, “your friend isn’t dying or anything! Are you sure you wouldn’t rather return to Hogsmeade?”

“I’m sure.”

“Well, alright then. Go on,” she instructed, gesturing to the place where Dream’s bed was hidden behind a curtain. “He’s a bit drowsy from the medicines, I must warn you.”

George thanked the Matron earnestly before ducking behind the white curtain and taking a seat right at the foot of his friend’s cot. Dream appeared to be dozing; his face was pale, and George would have thought him dead if it weren’t for the regular rise and fall of his chest.

George sat there for about twenty minutes in near silence before he heard the sound of a door creaking open and footsteps entering the Hospital Wing.

“Hannah?” a voice called out.

George froze. Unless he was mistaken, that voice belonged to none other than the Headmistress herself.

His suspicions were confirmed moments later when he heard Madame Abbott respond.

“Oh, Headmistress McGonagall!” the Matron exclaimed. “Are you feeling alright? Have you come for a Pepperup Potion?”

From his spot behind Dream’s curtains, George heard McGonagall close the Hospital Wing door shut.

“No, I’m afraid not,” McGonagall said. “I have...some instructions for you, Hannah.”

There was a pause and some shuffling before the conversation resumed.

“Instructions? Of what sort?”

George heard McGonagall sigh. “I’ve just been approached by someone from the Ministry with a request.”

“Is it to do with the Hospital Wing?”

“Yes, unfortunately. I am choosing to share this with you now in case they approach you without my knowledge. The Ministry has expressed the desire to start collecting voluntary blood donations from Hogwarts students.”

There was a gasp from Madame Abbott. George’s heartbeat quickened in his chest.

“Blood donations?”

“Yes,” replied McGonagall seriously. “They say it’s for medicinal research. Regardless of their intentions, I told them I will not have them collecting samples from underage children at this school.”

“Does it...” Madame Abbott paused as if searching for the right words to say. “Does this have anything to do with that new Ministry initiative? The one led by Selwyn?”

George inhaled sharply at the mention of Dream’s father.

“I believe so, yes,” McGonagall answered.

George’s thoughts were racing at a million miles a minute. The poster in Hogsmeade was bad enough, but the W.A.P. wanted to collect blood samples *in Hogwarts*?

The thought of some Ministry official taking vials of blood, *his blood*, to examine in some far off laboratory was enough to make him shudder.

“Anyway,” McGonagall said, clearing her throat, “if anyone approaches you about any sort of donation business, report it to me immediately. All this talk of curing Squibness as of late gives me a very bad feeling.”

“Of course, Headmistress. I’ll owl you straight away if I see anything suspicious.”

Before McGonagall left the room, George heard her pause and hover in the doorway.

“Be careful, Hannah,” she said in a low voice. “Not everyone understands that there are some things in this world we ought not to meddle with.”

Madame Abbott coughed nervously. “Would it be so bad? A cure, I mean.”

George could hear McGonagall take a deep breath.

“You are a Healer, Hannah. Your intentions are pure, but the same cannot be said of everyone in the Ministry. Our job isn’t to bend over backwards so that a few hypothetical Squibs can perhaps wield wands someday in the future.”

“But—”

“Our job is to protect the children here in the castle,” McGonagall stated firmly. “No matter the cost.”

According to AO3 statistics, only a small percentage of readers actually leave kudos and comments. If you enjoyed this chapter, please consider leaving kudos and a comment! It's free, anonymous, *and* it lets us know you want us to keep writing!

It's gonna be my (ken's) birthday next week and I'm going to the mountains, which means the next update might take a bit more time. But I'm bringing my laptop so hopefully I'll still be able to write :) I've also been working on some other little fic ideas, so those might be out at some point (this fic takes priority, though, don't worry).

My tumblr: kangarooken.tumblr.com

Gra55's tumblr: extragrassydetails.tumblr.com

See you next update! Lots of love!

Chapter Seventeen || Year Three

Chapter Summary

Their third year continues.

Chapter Notes

uhhhhhhhh.....hey!

So...it's been a while. Like, 2 weeks exactly. Sorry about the long wait. I had a great vacation and fantastic birthday! Thank you to everyone who wished me well. Those little comments were lovely to read :D

This chapter was a BITCH. It was typed out in teeny tiny chunks over the course of 2 weeks while I was using questionable mountain wifi. I was looking after 6 kids so I didn't get a lot of free time lol. Also, this has *not* been edited by Gra55 because they are super duper swamped with school, so sorry if it comes off suckier than usual. Blame me.

All that being said...enjoy Ken's brain vomit!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George didn't tell Dream about the conversation he'd overheard in the Hospital Wing.

It felt wrong to keep the information to himself; after all, Dream was his best friend and confidant. A part of George wanted to tell the other boy everything the second that Dream woke up from his potion-induced slumber.

But George was so *tired* .

He was tired of seeing Dream's dad on the covers of newspapers every other day. He was tired of the tension that seeped into his everyday conversations in the Great Hall. Most of all, he was tired of the strain that the W.A.P. was putting on his relationship with his best friend.

So George kept quiet. It wasn't like McGonagall's warning had been *meant* for his ears, anyway.

When Dream had finally recovered from his allergic reaction, George was quick to assure the Slytherin that everything was fine.

And everything *was* fine, George kept telling himself. They spent the rest of their weekend bantering and playing gobstones and cracking jokes over dinner just like usual.

Everything was fine.

~~~~~

“No, Ms. Minx, it isn’t *fine*,” Professor Borealis snapped during Tuesday’s Muggle Studies lesson. Predictably, the W.A.P. was brought up mere seconds after class started.

“Why not? Professor, if a Squib wants to have magic and we can give them magic, fine! Who cares? Just give them magic!” Minx exclaimed.

Professor Borealis pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed.

“Ms. Minx,” she said after a few moments, “do you think Squibs *need* to be cured?”

Something indiscernible flashed across Minx’s face before the Slytherin girl sat up a little straighter in her seat and schooled her expression into her usual bored stare.

“To be honest, Professor, I think we should just let them decide for themselves. I don’t understand all of this controversy,” she said evenly.

“...Right,” Professor Borealis continued, nodding. “And what of Muggles, then? If a Muggle-born wizard’s Muggle family wants magic as well, should we offer them magic?”

The class went silent at this. Professor Borealis’ eyes flickered over her students, pausing on Dream when she saw the Slytherin boy raise his hand.

“Yes, Mr. Selwyn?”

“I don’t see an issue with doing that,” Dream answered. “If everyone has magic, then everyone’ll be equal. Boom, no more racism.”

Techno snorted from his seat at the back of the class, causing everyone’s heads to snap in his direction.

“Oh, please,” he said. “You can’t honestly believe that. I’m just as much of a wizard as you are, yet your blood is supposedly ‘pure’ and mine is ‘filthy.’”

Dream opened his mouth to object, but Professor Borealis silenced him by holding up a hand.

“No, Mr. Selwyn,” the professor said, “Mr. Technoblade does have a point. If discrimination is rampant among Muggle-born witches and wizards, how can we expect attitudes to be any better towards *artificially* magical people?”

Many students nodded in understanding. Others, Dream included, looked unconvinced but had the sense not to push the matter further.

“Now, then,” Professor Borealis said, clapping her hands to bring the class’ attention back to the front of the room. “There seems to be one central point of misunderstanding among witches and wizards today. That misunderstanding is the nature of our relationship with magic.”

The professor summoned a piece of chalk with her wand before turning and scrawling something on the giant blackboard. Chalk dust floated to the floor like snow falling from her fingertips. It took her a few moments to finish writing, but when she did, George saw three words written in capital letters.

*YOU ARE MAGIC.*

Several students began to whisper curiously.

“You are magic?” Eret read out confusedly, voicing the question on everyone’s minds.

“Yes, Mr. Eretson.” Professor Borealis replied, her tone serious. “Magic is not something you *have*, it is something you *are*.”

“I...I’m afraid I don’t quite understand, Professor,” Eret stammered.

Professor Borealis smiled and tilted her head. Her gaze was somehow simultaneously soft and intimidating as she appraised Eret.

“What are you, Mr. Eretson?”

The Ravenclaw boy paused and bit his lip. “I’m a student at Hogwarts?”

“You’re a wizard,” the professor said, turning to gesture towards the rest of the class. “*All* of you are. Magic is a part of your identities. If I were to take away your magic, you would all be different people.”

There was more murmuring, then, as her words sunk in.

“Professor,” said Minx, “if you took away my magic, I’d just be a Squib.”

Professor Borealis’ eyes twinkled with some sort of emotion as she turned her attention to the Irish girl.

“I disagree with you, Miss Minx. Magic has shaped your whole life up until this point. If I were to take it away from you now, you would still be a witch at heart, wouldn’t you?”

The conversation continued as Minx and a couple of other students debated the professor, but George was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to contribute to the class discussion.

His professor’s words struck a chord with him. They caused memories to resurface in waves and voices from his past to whisper in his ear.

*Dream in the forest. “You—you’re magical, George!”*

*Finlay on the ground. “You absolute freak!”*

*His mother, holding his Hogwarts letter in her hands. “We always knew you were a special boy, Georgie.”*

Up until that point, George had always thought of his life as being composed of two parts: *before* and *after* magic. But as he listened to his Muggle Studies professor lecture his class, he realized that there had never been a *before*.

His magic was an inextricable part of his identity. He'd always been different, even before he'd known why.

"Why do you think we have a Muggle Studies course in the first place?" Professor Borealis asked loudly, dragging George out of his contemplation. "Non-magical peoples have their own distinct cultures and identities. Squibs are no exception. To 'cure' them would be to replace them with different people, and that, in my view, is unacceptable."

George could only stare at her with wide eyes as he absorbed the meaning of her statement. A few of his classmates still looked skeptical; Dream, in particular, was frowning, but he added nothing more to the discussion, for which George was thankful.

"Now, then," Professor Borealis said briskly, clapping her hands together. "If I recall correctly, you were all supposed to have read about forms of Muggle transportation over the weekend. I have a short presentation I want to show you..."

George could barely pay attention to the rest of the class, his brain still stuck on their previous discussion.

*You are magic.*

Dream had said something similar to him once, way back before they'd even received their Hogwarts letters.

*"Wait, Dream," George had said as the taller boy began to walk away. "You promise that what you're saying is real? It's not just some... joke ...right?"*

*Dream's dirty-blond hair had looked pale under the light of the moon.*

*"You really are magic, George. I promise."*

Perhaps, in some odd way, nine-year-old Dream had predicted all of the W.A.P. nonsense years before it began.

~~~~~

"Hey, George," Sapnap whispered for the millionth time in the library.

George, who was sat across the table from the Gryffindor, ignored the second-year in favor of completing another exercise from his Transfiguration textbook.

A few seconds passed before Sapnap whispered to him again.

"George."

Dream nudged George with his elbow and shot the Ravenclaw a pleading look.

“Just answer him, Gogi. He won’t shut up if you don’t.”

“Yeah,” Sapnap said smugly. “I can keep doing this all day. Oh, *Ge-ooooorge...Gogiiiiii !* Georgie-*poooooo* —”

“*What?*” George finally snapped.

“Woah, dude, chill,” Sapnap said, raising his hands. George resisted the urge to punch the younger boy in the face and gritted his teeth.

“What do you want?” he grumbled.

Sapnap wagged his eyebrows mischievously and George groaned.

“Minx is staring at you again,” the Gryffindor whispered conspiratorially. “Don’t look now, though.”

George immediately turned around and met the intimidating stare of the Slytherin girl sitting a few tables over. Upon meeting his gaze, Minx quickly glanced back down at her textbook.

“You *moron*, I said don’t look now!” Sapnap hissed, smacking the back of George’s head. George winced and shot the second-year a glare.

“What’s *wrong* with you?” George whispered angrily.

“You gotta act *cool*, dude. Girls like it when you play hard to get.”

Dream raised his eyebrow at the conversation and set his quill down on the table.

“Sapnap, what the heck are you talking about?” the Slytherin boy asked exasperatedly.

Sapnap smirked. “Uh, Minx *obviously* has the hots for Georgie.”

“So?”

“*So?* So we gotta be his wingmen, dude!”

Dream pursed his lips at that and glanced at George. The Ravenclaw boy was staring resolutely down at his notebook.

“...George? Any thoughts?” Dream prodded, nudging his friend’s shoulder.

George gave Dream a pleading look and shrugged helplessly. “I...dunno?” he offered.

Sapnap rolled his eyes and leaned forward in his seat. “C’mon, man, we’re your friends. If you like her, you should go for it! We’ll help you! Right, Dream?”

Dream shrugged and fiddled with the quill in his hand. George suddenly felt the overwhelming need to end the conversation.

“Look, Sapnap, can’t this wait? Dream and I have an important assignment to finish, and—”

“George, just answer this: do you think she’s cute?”

George felt his cheeks heat up at Sapnap’s question. He glanced at Dream in the hopes that his

friend would help him get out of it, but much to George's frustration the Slytherin boy's eyes stayed trained on his parchment.

Eventually, George just shrugged. "Uh...she's fine? I guess? She's kind of scary and sometimes I think she wants to kill me."

Sapnap sighed. "*George*. That doesn't answer the question."

George gulped and chanced another look at the Slytherin girl behind him. To his surprise, Minx was staring again. She hurriedly averted her eyes when she noticed George turn around, in favor of casually turning a textbook page and idly playing with a strand of her dark hair.

George furrowed his eyebrows in concentration, thinking hard.

Did he find her cute?

He contemplated her from afar. She wasn't bad-looking, he supposed. She had pretty blue eyes and a small upturned button nose that made her look a bit like a doll, which was...alright.

He'd never really stopped to consider girls before. He was fourteen, and while some of the other students in his year were "dating," George just didn't see the point in shallow teenage relationships. He was far too busy with school to worry about girls.

There was also another confusing detail George couldn't figure out, for even though Dream *and* Sapnap both seemed to be convinced that Minx fancied him, the concept made zero sense. Of all the boys in the castle, why would Minx pick *George* to fancy?

He wasn't very handsome. His voice was in that awkward phase where it cracked on every other word. He wasn't even tall; Minx was *taller* than him, and he'd heard that height was supposedly very important to girls.

No, it didn't make sense at all, and George's Ravenclaw brain was frustrated by the puzzle that Minx presented.

"Hey! Earth to George! Quit ogling the lady and answer my question, already!" Sapnap whined.

George quickly tore his eyes away from the girl and bit his bottom lip.

"Um...yeah, she's cute," he finally conceded, hoping the answer would be enough for Sapnap to drop the topic of conversation.

Beside George, Dream inhaled sharply.

"You think *Minx* is cute?" he asked in a disbelieving whisper. "The Minx who hexes you every other day and injects swear words into every sentence? *That* Minx?"

George shrugged, shrinking back into his seat at Dream's slightly confrontational tone. "Well, maybe when you put it *that* way..."

"Oh, zip it, Dream," Sapnap said with an eye roll. "The man can like whoever he likes. Plus, Minx is kinda pretty. I ship it."

"You 'ship' it?" Dream repeated questioningly.

"Yeah, dude. Like, I can picture them together. Oh!" Sapnap exclaimed, his eyes lighting up. "We gotta think of a ship name for them if they're gonna be a couple! Morge. Or Geor-inx? George-

inx...”

Dream abruptly stood up from their table and placed a hand on George’s shoulder. When George looked up at the Slytherin, he saw that Dream was scowling.

“C’mon, George,” he grumbled, moving to pick up his study materials. “Why don’t you sneak me into the Ravenclaw common room or something? This place is too distracting to get anything done.”

Sapnap pouted. “*Dream*, c’mon, don’t go. Since when do you care about studying anyway?”

“Since I started getting a ton of homework, you dipshit. I wouldn’t expect a second-year like you to understand.”

Once he’d finished gathering his things, George followed Dream out of the library, ignoring Sapnap’s pleas for them to stay. As soon as the two third-years were out in the corridor, Dream’s demeanor shifted. His shoulders immediately untensed and his expression smoothed out, making George wonder what had caused the Slytherin’s bad mood in the first place.

They were silent as they walked to Ravenclaw Tower together, speaking only to answer the knocker’s riddle before stepping inside the common room. It was a testament to how close the two boys were that none of the other Ravenclaws even batted an eye at the Slytherin in their midst.

Twenty minutes into their studying, Dream cleared his throat and looked up from his parchment. George was surprised to see that the other boy looked somewhat nervous.

“Uh...” Dream started, seemingly mulling over what to say. “I, uh, I was...uh...”

“What is it, Dream?” George asked in what he hoped was a reassuring voice.

“I was, um, just wondering if... *doyoureallylikeMinx?*”

“What?”

Dream sighed and averted his eyes. “Do you really like her? Minx, I mean.”

Oh. This again, George realized.

Not particularly eager to reopen that can of worms, George just shrugged.

“She’s alright. I don’t think I *fancy* her, though, if that’s what you’re asking.”

At George’s words, Dream looked oddly...relieved.

“Oh,” he breathed out. “Would you, you know, tell me? If you *did* like anyone?”

George smiled and shook his head fondly.

“You’re ridiculous, Dream. Of course I’d tell you. Now, could you tell me your answer for the third question?”

~~~~~

Winter crept up on the students of Hogwarts, blanketing the castle grounds in sheets of Scottish snow and bringing with it the promise of stressful examinations at the end of the term.

George, for one, couldn't wait for the term to be over. Although he loved his classes, he hated how he couldn't go one day without discussing politics.

"What year was Bridget Wenlock's theorem officially published?" George quizzed Dream a few days before their Arithmancy exam.

Dream groaned as he struggled to remember the date. "Um...the one about the magical properties of the number seven?" he asked, stalling.

"Um, yes. It's only the most important theorem in modern Arithmancy. Now tell me the date!"

"Uh...twelve-twelve."

"No, Dream. The answer is twelve-seventy-seven. The year *literally* has two sevens in it."

"I don't *wanna* study anymore, George," Dream whined, throwing his quill down on the library table. "Let's talk about something else. Got any plans for the holidays?"

George groaned and buried his face in his hands. "You're impossible. Why do I even bother trying to help you?"

"Cuz you love me."

"I do *not*."

"Hey, lovebirds, quit arguing and take a look at this," Sapnap said as he slid smoothly into a seat at their table with what looked like a newspaper in his hands.

"What is it with everyone and reading *newspapers*?" Dream asked. "Are you *actually* subscribed to the *Daily Prophet*? I didn't take you for the reading type, Sapnap."

"Shut up, it's Karl's," Sapnap grumbled, pointing to something on the newspaper's front cover. "Check this out, guys! We should totally do it!"

George leaned forward in his seat to read the headline. As his eyes scanned the words, his heart sank.

*W.A.P. ANNOUNCES 7 NEW BLOOD DONATION STATIONS ACROSS GREAT BRITAIN*, the header read.

When George next spoke, his voice sounded detached to his own ears.

"Y-you want to donate blood, Sapnap?" he asked, voice squeaking at the end of the question.

Sapnap nodded eagerly, prompting Dream to snort.

"Oh, come on," the Slytherin said, "Sapnap isn't selfless enough to wanna donate blood just *cuz*. What's the real reason, man?"

Sapnap huffed indignantly. "You think I have some ulterior motive? Can't I just be a good guy looking to help a few Squibs?"

George was growing more and more uncomfortable by the second, but his friends didn't seem to notice as they carried on their conversation.

"Let me see the article," Dream demanded, pulling the paper closer to himself and squinting to read the fine print. He took a few moments to skim the text before rolling his eyes and passing the paper back.

"What does it say?" George asked anxiously.

"He's not an altruist," Dream replied. "He just wants to win some free Quidditch World Cup tickets."

Before George could say anything else, Sapnap groaned and crossed his arms.

"Okay, *okay*, you got me. But c'mon, dude! It's *four V.I.P. tickets*. Those cost a fortune!"

"Sapnap, you realize your chances of actually winning those tickets are, like, one in seven-point-five-trillion, right? Each blood donation is just *one* lottery entry," Dream said.

"That's not zero, though!" Sapnap shot back. "Plus, it's free to donate. One of the places is just over in Hogsmeade, so what do we have to lose? Karl and Bad and Skeppy are all going to do it. We could, like, make a pact where if one of us wins, we have to take the other people to the game with us."

George bit his lip and wondered what he could possibly say to dissuade his friend from donating. Luckily, Dream beat him to it.

"Don't waste your time," the blond said. "My dad was planning on buying tickets anyway. I'll just ask him to bring you along."

"But those aren't *free*!" Sapnap whined.

"Tickets are tickets, dude. Plus, you and Skeppy are only second-years. You don't even *get* to go to Hogsmeade yet, so how would you get to the facility?"

Sapnap smiled mischievously. "We have our ways."

George adjusted his glasses nervously and cleared his throat. "I agree with Dream. What's the point of having rich friends if you don't let them buy you expensive things, anyway?"

"*Hey*," Dream said. "Are you just using me for my money, Gogi?"

"Oh, be quiet," George huffed.

Sapnap grinned. "Wait, that makes Dream a sugar da—"

"*Hey!* Quiet down, you muffin!" Bad stage-whispered, walking up to Sapnap and clamping a hand over the younger boy's mouth. "This is a *library*. Can't you see they're studying? I know for a fact that you have a Transfiguration essay due because Skeppy was— *ACK!* Did you just *lick* me?!"

Sapnap took that opportunity to snatch up his borrowed newspaper and sprint out of the library, leaving an annoyed Bad to chase after him. George watched their figures retreat with mixed feelings swirling in his gut.

"You good?" Dream asked once the other boys were gone.

“What? Oh, yeah,” George answered, swallowing his anxiety and forcing himself to reopen his Arithmancy textbook. “Now, where were we?”

~~~~~

George’s winter break was terrible.

He knew that year’s holiday season would not be a fun one the second he stepped off the Hogwarts Express. His mother’s smile looked strained when she greeted him at the train station.

“Hello, Georgie,” she said, her usual excitement at seeing her son missing.

George immediately sensed something was off. “What’s wrong?” he asked nervously. “Where’s Dad?”

“Your father’s a bit busy right now, Love. He’s with your nan at the hospital,” she explained, ushering her son out to the car park.

“The hospital?” George repeated. “Is Nana alright? You didn’t mention anything about the hospital in your last letter.”

George’s mum smiled weakly, but it looked more like a grimace. “Georgie...Nana’s eighty-six years old. When she gets sick, it takes her much longer to recover, and now that she’s been diagnosed with pneumonia...” her voice trailed off, the unspoken meaning behind her words clear.

George stopped in his tracks to gaze at his mum with newfound realization. “She’s going to die,” he stated.

His mother’s eyes widened at his bluntness. “What? N-no, Georgie, that’s not what—”

“That’s exactly what you meant, Mum. Dad’s at the hospital with Nana because she’s going to die.”

George knew his words sounded insensitive even before his mum’s expression morphed into one of anger.

“*George*. Have some tact!” his mum snapped. “Your grandmother is in poor health and your father is distraught. The doctors have been taking good care of her, but no one knows how much time she has left. I will not have you upsetting everyone further with your callous comments!”

George flinched. His mum rarely used her angry voice with him.

“Sorry,” George mumbled as he placed his luggage into the trunk of the car.

His mum sighed and made her way to the driver’s seat. “Just...things have been difficult lately, George. On your father especially. You don’t—” her voice broke off and she pinched the bridge of her nose.

“It’s okay, Mum. I understand.”

“No, you don’t, but it isn’t your fault. We know how much your school means to you and we didn’t want you to worry, but I should probably tell you before we get home,” she said, voice serious.

George sat still in his seat, dread pooling in his stomach.

“Your father’s out of a job,” Mrs. Davidson eventually said with a sigh.

George blinked several times as he processed the words.

“Dad’s been sacked?”

“No, he hasn’t been *sacked*. He’s been...laid off.”

“Isn’t that the same thing?”

“It’s different.”

“Are we poor now or something?”

George’s mum went silent.

“...Mum?”

“We’re going to have to make a few lifestyle changes, and I want you to be prepared.”

As his mother recounted all of the various adjustments their family would have to make to make ends meet, George selfishly wished he’d stayed at Hogwarts.

~~~~~

“What do you mean you can’t hang out?” Dream asked incredulously two days into their break.

George shrugged and kicked a chunk of snow with the toe of his boot.

“I’m busy,” was all he said. Evidently, the answer didn’t satisfy his best friend.

“Busy with *what*? It’s almost Christmas! We always hang out before Christmas.”

“I...” George debated what to say next. “I have a job.”

Dream spluttered and crossed his arms. “A *job*? You’re fourteen.”

“So?” George retorted, cheeks warming. “My mum’s friend needs a babysitter. I’m going to be looking after a few children several times a week.”

“Can’t they get anyone else to do it?” Dream whined.

“What? Why? It doesn’t even matter, Dream, I’ll still be able to spend time with you.”

“Yeah, but not *enough* time!”

“It’s not like *you* are always available to spend time with me. You’re in Wales half the time, anyway, so why do you care?”

“You *know* I’m always back in the afternoon! Tell the woman you can only babysit in the mornings or something.”

George scowled. “That’s not how it works, Dream, and you know it.”

“I just don’t get it!” Dream cried, throwing his hands in the air. “You’ve never wanted to get a job before, so why *now*? Why do you have to do this before Christmas, of all times? I was really looking forward to—”

“Because I *need* the money, Dream!”

Dream stared at George with wide eyes. George didn’t often shout at him, so it never failed to shut the Slytherin up when he did.

“I-I’m sorry,” George stammered, deflating. “It’s just that…”

Dream’s eyes were concerned as they looked into George’s own. “What’s going on, George?” he asked softly.

George swallowed and averted his eyes. “My dad lost his job.”

Dream furrowed his eyebrows. “He did?”

“Yeah. In October, apparently. My parents didn’t tell me because they didn’t want me to worry.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. Oh,” George repeated. “And it’s not like he can just go out and get another one because he’s in his fifties and he spends all of his time with my nan.”

Dream reached out and put a hand on George’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “That must suck.”

“Yeah,” George shrugged. “It does.”

A few moments passed in silence, neither boy really knowing what to say.

“Well, anyway,” George finally said, clearing his throat, “I guess I should—”

He was abruptly cut off when Dream pulled him into a hug.

It took George a few moments to react, but he eventually recovered from the shock enough to shakily wrap his arms around Dream’s torso and bury his face in the other boy’s jumper. It was warm and smelled like floral laundry detergent.

“Thanks,” George whispered.

“Anytime,” came Dream’s reply.

And, for what had to be the millionth time in his life, George was incredibly thankful for his best

friend. Because, in spite of his denseness and attitude and tendency to be incredibly annoying at times, Dream always knew just what to do and say to make George feel better.

~~~~~

Dream tried to give George five galleons for Christmas. George handed the money back only to find the gold coins in his coat pocket when he returned home.

George decided to convert the currency and give the money to his mum. He told her that he found it outside on the street.

Her smile as she took the notes from him was brighter than anything George had seen in a while.

Thank you, Dream.

~~~~~

His nan died on New Year's Eve.

George was there when it happened. He stood by her bedside together with his father in the dimly lit hospital room while the world outside celebrated the coming of the new year with fireworks and champagne.

It felt cruel to have to watch someone die on an evening so full of life.

All in all, George found death to be quite anticlimactic.

There were no horrific gasps for air, no gruesome sights, no screams of agony. Only the gentle flatlining of the heart monitor and the soft whisper of his grandmother's final breath.

His mother arrived several minutes too late. When she burst through the door, she immediately rushed to hug his father.

His father was crying, George realized. He couldn't remember the last time he'd seen his father cry.

*Eighty-six years old. A good, long life,* his mum had said to his dad. The words were meant to be comforting, but they only made George feel angry at the injustice of it all.

Wizards lived to be hundreds of years old. Dumbledore had lived to one hundred sixteen. His predecessor had died at age three hundred fifty-five. God, even the *Trolley Witch* from the Hogwarts Express was nearing her two hundredth birthday.



Wizards didn't die of natural causes at the age of eighty-six. Eighty-six was considered *young* to many magical people.

As his dad's form shook with silent sobs, George wondered.

For all that he hated wizard supremacy and the misguided views that magical people held towards Muggles, a part of George wondered if Dream was right when he said that the W.A.P.'s research could help give magic to everyone.

If magic could give him a hundred more years with his Muggle parents, who was he to oppose its distribution?

He watched the fireworks in the reflection of his grandmother's glassy eyes until he was ushered out of the room.

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The end of winter break could not have come soon enough for George.

Things had been gloomy in the Davidson home after his nan passed away. His dad spent the first days of January either staring at the wall or crying silently to himself, which George found terribly unnerving.

Crying wasn't something fathers were supposed to do. Fathers were supposed to be the strong ones.

When the first day of his second semester arrived, George was more than ready to leave.

The ride to the train station was tense. His mum tried to make conversation on the way there, but each of her attempts only lapsed into awkward silence.

On the platform, George was offered two stiff hugs.

"Take care, Georgie," his mum murmured. "Remember to write."

"I will, Mum."

"Goodbye, George," said his dad.

With that, his parents turned around and made their way back to the car, leaving George alone on Platform Nine and Three-Quarters.

Thankfully, he wasn't alone for long. He soon spotted the familiar figures of his roommates all huddled together on the other side of the platform, laughing and joking about something undoubtedly more fun than anything George had done over break. Putting on his best neutral smile, George lugged his trunk over to where his friends were standing.

Wilbur spotted him first.

"George!" he exclaimed happily, beckoning him closer. "It's good to see you, mate!"

Eret and Techno soon turned around and echoed similar sentiments, and George's forced smile soon transformed into a genuine one.

"Hey, guys," George greeted them warmly.

Wilbur slung an arm over George's shoulder and sighed. "Ah, sometimes these breaks just never seem to end, do they?" he remarked.

"Tell me about it," George nodded.

"You know what? I *will*! I was just about to tell Eret all about it, as a matter of fact!"

"Here we go again," Techno muttered.

Wilbur let go of George and shot Techno a glare. "Oi, quit pretending like you weren't complaining about him, too!" he said before turning back to George. "Gogi, you would *not* believe this neighbor of mine. I never thought I would ever have such a violent reaction to the sight of a child."

Eret perked up at this. "Oh, that guy that moved in across the street from you?" he asked with a tilt of his head. "What was his name again?"

"Tommy," Wilbur said through gritted teeth. "*Apparently* the child is afraid of owls. Who would have guessed? Because *I* sure didn't know!"

George and Eret shared an amused look while Techno snickered and raised his hand. "I did, though," he said.

"I know *you* did, you arse! *You're* the reason I got in trouble!" Wilbur cried, kicking Techno in the shin. "I can't believe you trained the bloody bird to attack blonds!"

George's draw dropped. "Techno did *what*?"

"Didn't you hear me?" Wilbur huffed. "He taught my owl to attack blond people, and nobody believed me when I told them that!"

Techno chuckled. "Listen, Wil, it was Godric Gryffindor who once said: 'If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat.' Clearly, the problem here was that you knew yourself, but not the enemy."

Wilbur scoffed at the bizarre monologue. "How the *fuck* was I supposed to know that Tommy was afraid of owls?"

"Well I wasn't *born* with that knowledge, I just asked 'im," Techno shrugged.

"Oh, really," Wilbur scoffed, "what, did you just go up to him and him what his greatest fear was?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Oh, and then he said something like 'Well, Big Man Technoblade, I just start pissing myself as soon as I see an owl.' Is that right?" Wilbur asked rhetorically, voice dripping with sarcasm.

Techno just nodded solemnly. "Word for word, Wil. Word for word."

Wilbur huffed, massaging the bridge of his nose. "You know, you could have at least used your *own* owl to attack the child."

"Yeah, I probably coulda," Techno shrugged, a sly smirk creeping onto his face. "But you see, *my* owl was busy fetchin' me packages from Weasley 'n Weasley."

George's eyes widened. One didn't have to be a Ravenclaw to know that Techno purchasing prank items was seldom a good sign.

"So *that's* how you got your hands on those potions!" Wilbur exclaimed.

"What potions?" Eret asked, voicing George's thoughts.

Techno cleared his throat. "Well, if you recall our trip to Hogsmeade, you'll remember that one of our friends landed 'imself in the Hospital Wing after consumin' a... very interestin' potion."

George groaned at the memory he'd never be able to forget. He'd been terrified for Dream's life that entire day.

"Well, I was just thinkin' about it one day— cuz that was absolutely hilarious, I mean, imagine havin' allergies! What a nerd, just grow up, man! — but anyways, I remembered the *intended* purpose of the potion, and...let's just say I wanted to go *ahead* and see if I could use it on Tommy."

"Y-you made a Muggle drink a potion?!" Eret stuttered. "That's dangerous, mate!"

Techno gave Eret an incredulous look. "What?" he said, "no! I wasn't tryna drug the guy! I used the Missin' Body Mixture on myself and had Wilbur pretend to be my detached body."

George shook his head in disbelief as Wilbur threw his head back in laughter.

"It was bloody brilliant!" the curly haired boy exclaimed. "I'd listen to my mum shout at me a thousand more times if it meant I got to see that little shit's terrified face again!"

"What did this child even do that you two have it out for him?" George asked, unable to suppress a smile.

Wilbur wrapped the arm around George's shoulder tightly once more and gave the shorter boy a friendly squeeze. "Oh, Gogi, just wait until you meet Tommy. You'll understand."

Techno nodded. "Yeah. Let's just say that most people find him *really* annoyin' when they first meet him, and we were no exception."

"I see..." George trailed off.

"Oh, don't feel too bad for him," Wilbur said, "that little bugger deserved it. Can you guess what he did afterwards?"

"Er...cry?" George guessed.

"He brought his little friend over to my yard and they both drew penises all over my fence with chalk!"

George snickered at the idea while Eret raised an eyebrow.

"I think... there's a bit of a difference between drawing dicks and traumatizing a poor Muggle child into thinking you've been beheaded," Eret remarked.

"That's not all he did, though!" Wilbur insisted. "He lied to my mum and said that I pushed him, so then she gave him *my* cookies! As if that wasn't enough, the child also stole one of my robes and

then made me chase him down the entire street to get it back! Then he called my favorite pen *rubbish!* "

George grimaced at the mention of the pen. Anyone who insulted Wilbur's pens was lucky to be alive.

"Wait, you have a favorite pen?" Techno asked. "Isn't that like havin' a favorite child?"

"Of course, I love all of my pens. But the first one you gave me holds a special place in my heart," Wilbur grinned, removing his arm from around George's shoulder to pat his robe pockets. "I always keep it on me for good luck."

Their conversation was put on pause when Dream and Schlatt walked up to their group, spurring another round of greetings. After several moments, the train blared its horn in warning, signalling for the students to board.

"Hey," Dream murmured in George's ear as the boys piled onto the Hogwarts Express. George shot his friend a soft smile in response.

"Hey yourself," he said back.

"I missed you."

George's heart stuttered at the words and he felt a sudden urge to wrap his best friend in a hug. Instead, he stowed his trunk away and took his favorite seat by the window, waiting for Dream to slide in next to him before fondly bumping the blond with his elbow.

"I missed you, too," George said in a voice barely above a whisper. "I'm sorry we didn't get to hang out much over break."

"It's okay. *I* should be the one apologizing," Dream replied. "I wanted to say sorry for acting like a spoiled brat about your babysitting gig. I was just bummed 'cuz I wanted you all to myself, I guess."

George could feel his cheeks start to warm. Averting his eyes, he reached into his backpack and pulled out a deck of Muggle playing cards.

"Well," he said, "we have the whole train ride to catch up now, and I wanted to teach you a new card game I learned over break. Would you like to shuffle?"

As Dream grinned and snatched the cards from George's hands, George couldn't help but sigh contentedly. Eight-odd hour train rides weren't so bad when one was with friends.

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A fresh layer of snow covered the quaint little houses in Hogsmeade, transforming the village into a scene from a Christmas picture book.

As he followed the other students and staff to the castle, George couldn't resist tilting his face to the sky and catching a few falling snowflakes on his tongue. He closed his eyes as the little white flakes landed on his eyelids and melted one by one, creating the illusion of tears streaming down his cheeks.

He opened his eyes when he heard the unmistakable click of a digital camera and quickly turned his head to find Dream hurriedly tucking one back into his robe pocket.

"Did you just photograph me?" George asked his guilty-looking friend.

"Maybe."

"Why would you—"

He was cut off by a snowball hitting him squarely in the face, causing him to splutter and frantically search for the culprit.

"Oi, George!" called out a familiar Irish voice from a little ways ahead.

"M-Minx?!" George exclaimed, "you can't just throw snowballs at people's faces! That could have *blinded* me, you absolute—"

*Splat.* Another snowball smacked him in the face.

"Oh, that's it," George muttered, scooping up a handful of snow and setting his sights on the Slytherin girl in front of him. Without any further warning, George sprinted up ahead and chased a giggling Minx up the path, eventually managing to reach out and shove his snowball down the back of her robes.

"YOU MOTHERFUCKER!" Minx screamed. When she turned around, her expression was one of unmasked rage.

"Er..." George stuttered, throwing his hands up in surrender and taking several steps back. "Sorry, um, I didn't mean to...well, you *were* the one who started it, and..."

"I'm giving ye three seconds to run."

"What?"

"*One.* "

"Minx, we're almost to the castle already. Maybe we can just—"

"*Two,*" she continued menacingly. George swallowed nervously and turned on his heels.

He only made it about ten steps before Minx finished counting and tore off after him, screaming bloody murder.

"*HELP!*" George yelled as he sprinted through the snow.

"Run, Gogi!" Wilbur shouted unhelpfully as he passed. He could hear Minx gaining ground, her longer legs propelling her swiftly through the snow drifts until George could practically *feel* her breathing down his neck.

"I GOT YOU!" she screamed into his ear, tackling George into the snow.

He fell flat on his face, barely having the time to break his fall with his hands before Minx was straddling his back and pinning his arms to the ground.

“P-please, Minx, I’m sorry!” George cried, spitting mouthfuls of snow out of his mouth and struggling under the girl’s weight. Minx merely laughed and leaned in closer to George’s ear.

“I *win*, Georgie!” she cackled, tightening her grip on his arms. “Admit that I won.”

For some reason, George didn’t feel like giving into the Slytherin girl that easily.

“You’re insane,” he huffed instead.

“Nuh-uh, George! Say that I won!”

“No.”

“Admit it or I’ll shove more fuckin’ snow in your fuckin’ face!”

“You’re a raving lunatic!”

“And you’re a pussy!”

Minx suddenly shifted her weight to adjust her grip, giving George the perfect opportunity to kick out his legs and push her back into the snow. Knocked off-balance, she yelped as her back hit the white ground.

“Ha!” George exclaimed triumphantly once their positions were reversed. He was quick to pin her arms above her head and childishly blow a raspberry in her face. “Looks like *I* won, Minx.”

To George’s surprise, Minx didn’t say a word in reply. They both stared at each other as the snowflakes swirled around them, breaths coming out in puffs of smoke.

Suddenly embarrassed by their proximity, George averted his eyes and made to remove his hands.

“S-sorry,” he stammered, blushing. “I’ll just, um…”

Then the strangest thing happened. Minx *smiled*.

“George,” she said, “I—”

“*GEORGE!*” someone screamed behind them. In seconds, a pair of arms wrapped around his torso and lifted him to his feet, causing him to stumble a bit before righting himself.

“Dream,” George said, shaking the snowflakes from his hair.

“What are you *doing*?!” the blond yelled at the girl in the snow. “Did you hex him or something?”

Minx’s previously neutral expression morphed into her usual scowl.

“Relax,” she spat, pushing herself to her feet. “I didn’t jinx your fuckin’ boyfriend.”

Dream crossed his arms defensively and spun around to face George, his eyes scanning the shorter boy’s form.

“Are you good? Are you hurt? Are you bleeding anywhere?” he interrogated him as George brushed the snow from his robes.

"I'm *fine*, Dream," George huffed, brain still trying to process what had just happened. Ignoring his best friend for a moment, the Ravenclaw boy sprinted after Minx's retreating form.

"Wait, Minx," George called out, placing a hand on her shoulder.

"*What*, " she demanded, turning around to face him.

"You-you're, well, um..." George stammered, pulling out his wand and muttering a spell under his breath. A rush of hot air burst from his wand tip and dried the Slytherin girl's wet robes in the blink of an eye.

When George looked up, Minx seemed surprised.

"Oh," she said. "You...wow. Th-thanks, George."

"No problem," George replied cheerfully. "It's the least I could do after winning."

He didn't even flinch when Minx responded by punching him in the shoulder.

The two of them caught up with the other Ravenclaw boys and quickly joined in their happy conversation. George didn't look back as they approached the gates of the castle and stepped onto the Hogwarts grounds as a group.

If he *had* looked back, he would have noticed Dream lagging behind and glaring daggers at the back of Minx's head.

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"What. The. Hell."

George looked up from where he sat in an armchair in the Ravenclaw common room and met the angry gaze of none other than Technoblade. The other third-year looked absolutely livid as he approached George.

"What is it?" George asked his roommate, closing the book in his lap.

In lieu of a response, Techno tossed a crumpled sheet of paper into George's hands.

Sensing something off, George carefully uncrinkled the paper and held it up to the light while Techno silently seethed beside him.

"Is this...a flyer?" George asked as his eyes took in bright printed colors and bold font.

"Yep. Some *bastard* hung it up on the notice board," Techno grumbled.

The flyer in George's hands was enchanted so that the pictures moved, much like a magical photograph. Underneath text that read *SAVE THE SQUIBS* was an image of a crying little girl who looked to be no older than six years old. A white speech bubble was drawn close to her mouth, the words *I want to go to Hogwarts, too!* printed within it in bright blue font. At the very bottom of the page were instructions on how to donate blood for magical research along with the W.A.P. logo.

George was speechless.

“Wh...what?” was all he managed to say in response to the flyer.

Techno muttered something under his breath and snatched the wrinkled paper out of George’s hands, withdrawing his wand from his pocket.

“*Incendio*,” he said, immediately setting the thing on fire.

George sat there for several moments, simply watching the paper slowly turn to ash. When the flyer was nothing more than charred dust, he cleared his throat and looked up at Techno with worried eyes.

“Do you think one of the staff members hung it up?” he asked nervously.

Techno shrugged and vanished the pile of ash with another muttered spell. “I don’t freakin’ know, but I’m *really* not likin’ this. It’s straight up propaganda.”

George nodded and bit his lip, his mind racing with questions. One in particular was at the forefront of his thoughts.

Did Dream know anything about...?

“Listen,” Techno said quietly, “we can’t let this slide. You and I both know that this W.A.P. stuff is utter pigshit. If you see any more of these papers around the castle, just take ‘em down and burn ‘em.”

With that, Techno turned around and marched up to the dormitories. George watched him leave with a mounting sense of dread.

Chapter End Notes

So you won't believe this, but according to AO3 statistics, only a *teeny tiny* percentage of readers actually leave kudos and comments. You know the feeling when you try to leave extra kudos and AO3 has the audacity to tell you *no*? I present to you a solution: COMMENTS! They're free! They're anonymous! They let us know you actually want us to keep writing! Woohoo!

In all seriousness, thank you to everyone who takes the time out of their day to leave comments. Reading them is an absolute joy. Even though sometimes I get too busy to respond I always read each and every one and I cherish them dearly <3

See you next update! I start uni on the 20th so I'm not sure about the exact chapter date, but I can assure you that this fic will be my preferred method of procrastination!

my tumblr: kangarookan.tumblr.com

grass' tumblr: extragrassydetails.tumblr.com

Chapter Eighteen || Year Three

Chapter Summary

Students get ready for Valentine's Day at Hogwarts.

Chapter Notes

Hello, lovely readers! Thank you for being so patient and sticking with this story! I present to you...another update! Enjoy!

Grass and I would like to give a very very very big thank you to naruhi on Tumblr who made some incredible fanart for this fic. I legit *squealed* when I saw it. Please check it out here: <https://naruhi16-art.tumblr.com/post/640668975769976832/its-called-like-magic-by-kangarooken>

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Report cards came out on the Friday after the end of winter break. As a result, the Ravenclaw table was bustling with activity as students ran around during lunch to compare their grades.

When George received his marks back for his end-of-term exams, he was overjoyed to discover that he'd achieved *Outstanding* s in all subjects except for Defense Against the Dark Arts. His roommates had all scored extremely well on their assessments as well, much to their delight.

The Slytherins, on the other hand, weren't all too eager to share their grades.

"What?!" Dream exclaimed upon seeing George's marks. "How did you get an *O* in *Arithmancy*?! That test was so hard!"

George smirked and tucked his report card back into his pocket.

"I *told* you," he said, "if you actually *paid* attention in class instead of doodling the whole time—"

"Never mind," Dream cut him off with a roll of his eyes. "I don't need another lecture. Let's make fun of Schlatt and Minx, instead," he suggested, gesturing towards his unamused Housemates.

"They actually *failed* Divination."

This statement caught the attention of Wilbur, who perked up in his spot a few seats over.

"Schlatt, *really*?" he asked, looking genuinely surprised. "Even after I helped you with your crystal-gazing homework?"

George saw Schlatt and Minx share an amused look.

"Oh, yeah, you did 'help' us out, didn't you, Wil? I forgot about that," Schlatt remarked.

Wilbur turned to face the two Slytherins and gave Schlatt a look that said, *are you serious?*

“Schlatt, your memory is horrid,” the curly haired boy replied. “You and Minx begged me to lend you my essay and then spent a very long time studying it.”

Minx snickered while Schlatt nodded solemnly. “Oh, yeah. We *did* spend a really long time studying that essay, didn’t we, Minx? You know, taking our own detailed notes and such.”

“Mhm,” Minx hummed in reply. “We took *very* detailed notes. Totally didn’t use an enchanted Copy-Quill to duplicate it or anything.”

Wilbur crossed his arms and shook his head. “For two people who spend so much time studying my work, both of you are incredibly slow learners.”

Schlatt sighed exaggeratedly. “What can we say, Wil?” he asked with a shrug. “We don’t have those big blue Ravenclaw brains.”

“It’s not about being a Ravenclaw,” George said with an eye roll. “It’s about *effort*.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Schlatt replied dismissively, “that’s what all o’ you big brains say.”

“What was your Ancient Runes score, George?” Minx asked with a tilt of her head.

George tried not to sound too proud as he replied, “I got an O.”

Minx sighed dramatically and glared down at her own paper. “I only got an *Acceptable*,” she confessed. “I’m rubbish.”

“I’m sure you’re not *that* bad,” George said reassuringly. “Ancient Runes is all about memorization, anyway. All you have to do is spend a little more time in the library.”

Minx smiled at that and blinked her eyes at him thoughtfully. “Maybe...we could study together, sometime. In the library.”

Before George could answer her, Schlatt gave a loud guffaw and slapped his own leg dramatically.

“Pigs’ll fly before *you* willingly spend time in the library, you fat cow!” he jeered. Minx responded by scowling and punching him in the stomach.

“You’re a fuckin’ piece of fuckin’ horse shit! I hope you fuckin’ die in a fuckin’ fire, you fuckin’ prick!” she screamed back at him.

While the two Slytherin friends yelled and bickered, George and Dream exchanged a look and mutually decided to sneak away from the table. The sound of Minx loudly cursing carried through the halls as they walked together to their next class.

~~~~~

When George walked into the Great Hall for breakfast on the first day of February, he was appalled to discover that the whole place had been decorated a light gray color overnight.

The familiar blue banner above the Ravenclaw table now had pale gray streamers hanging off it. Upon stepping closer, George realized that the napkins were all emblazoned with little hearts.

“What’s all this rubbish?” he asked Wilbur as he sat down. His roommate looked up at him like he was stupid.

“Gogi, it’s February! The season of love has begun!” Wilbur replied, flicking an errant curl out of his eyes.

“Yeah, but...” George trailed off, eyeing the decorations distastefully. All of the goblets had been charmed gray. “Everything looks so *dead*. Why did they make all this stuff gray, anyway?”

Someone snorted behind him, and George turned around to see Dream taking his seat with a smile on his freckled face.

“What’s so funny?” the shorter boy asked with a frown. Dream merely pointed to the top of George’s head in response.

“I think that Gogi forgot to put his goggles on this morning,” the Slytherin said.

“My goggles? Wh—oh!” George hurriedly patted his hair and lowered his color correction glasses onto his face. Immediately, he gasped as what had to be at least fifty shades of gray suddenly transformed into an array of bright pink hues.

“It’s *pink*!” George exclaimed, prompting the other boys at the table to snicker.

“Of course it’s pink, you idiot,” Dream laughed. “It’s *February*. They do this every year in the leadup to Valentine’s Day.”

George blushed and busied himself with spooning sugar into his bowl of oatmeal. “I’m colorblind, okay? You’re not allowed to make fun of me.”

“C’mon, even colorblind people know that pink is a February color.”

“Dream, colors do not have assigned months!” Eret chimed in from across the table. “That whole notion is a social construct. In fact, pink only became associated with love and such because the Ancient Romans believed that—”

Eret was abruptly cut off when an overeager Gryffindor boy slammed into the side of the table, knocking over several goblets in his rush to sit down.

“Sapnap! What the hell!” Eret exclaimed in annoyance. “I was in the middle of explaining the origins of—”

“Yeah, yeah, put the nerd stuff on pause for a moment,” Sapnap interrupted, turning to face George. “I need to talk to Georgie!”

George raised an eyebrow, wondering what on earth his friend could possibly have to say to him at half past seven in the morning.

“Uh...okay?” he said. “What’s up?”

Sapnap rolled his eyes. “I need to talk to you *in private*,” the Gryffindor amended.

George reluctantly rose from his seat and followed the second-year to the Gryffindor table, exchanging a questioning glance with Dream as he went. Sapnap wasted no time in getting to the point once the two were finally seated among the other red-robed students.

“We need to talk about Minx,” he said immediately, causing George to promptly choke on his own spit.

Once George was done spluttering, he shot Sapnap a glare.

“*That* is what you dragged me over here for?” he said disbelievingly.

“Well, yeah,” Sapnap shrugged. “It’s already February and you *still* haven’t asked her out yet. I had to get you alone so I could ask you why the hell you’re stalling.”

“Wh—? Ask her— *Sapnap!* Who said anything about asking anyone out?”

“Clearly *you* haven’t, which is why we have to have this discussion.”

The two friends stared at each other for several moments before George looked away and groaned.

“Sapnap, I’m not going to ask Minx out,” he grumbled.

“Oh, yeah? Why not?” Sapnap challenged. “She *clearly* likes you, dude.”

George buried his too-hot face in his hands. “Because I don’t fancy her!”

“*Oooh, I don’t fancy her,*” Sapnap mocked in a horrible impression of George’s British accent.

“She’s the only girl I’ve ever seen you talk to. Also, your birthdays are only two days apart. That’s, like, fate.”

“How is *that* relevant at all?”

Sapnap grinned and pulled a wrinkled piece of paper out of his pocket, setting it on the table and pointing at what looked like a picture of a scorpion.

“What is that?” George asked, crossing his arms.

“It’s a page I tore out of Karl’s Divination textbook,” Sapnap reported.

“*What?!* You tore a page out of a *textbook*?”

“Just shut up and listen,” the second-year said hastily. “This is from the Astrology unit: ‘*When two Scorpions make a love match, it is a fierce tempest of intense passion—*’”

“Are you seriously bringing up horoscopes?”

“—*and the relationship formed can truly be the best thing in the world.*’ Now, doesn’t that sound great?” Sapnap grinned.

George facepalmed.

“You’re an idiot.”

“It’s in the *stars*, George! You have to ask her out. Come on! I’ll help you!” the Gryffindor offered.

“What do you have to lose?”

George paused and bit his lip.

He didn’t *think* he fancied Minx. She was his friend, just like Schlatt and Eret and Wilbur were all his friends. The only different thing about her was that she was a girl.

According to Sapnap, though, her being a girl was very significant.

*Is that what dating is?* he wondered. *Girl plus friend equals girlfriend?*

“Well,” George huffed, still blushing, “if Minx really *does* fancy me, why hasn’t she said anything

to me yet? Nothing's stopping her from asking *me* out, you know."

Sapnap rolled his eyes in response. "You sound like Eret. Listen, George, you're the *guy*. Guys are the ones who have to do the asking."

"But that's not fair!"

"Life's not fair. Don't be a chicken. There's a pretty girl who likes you and wants to be your girlfriend, so you are going to ask her out on Valentine's Day."

And so George listened as Sapnap formulated a plan. Eventually, the bell rang, cutting the discussion short and forcing them both out of the Great Hall. As George stood up from the Gryffindor table, the last line of the wrinkled textbook paper caught his eye.

*A relationship between Scorpios could go either way: It will either be the most wonderful thing in the world or result in the destruction of both involved.*

~~~~~

There was so much pink around the castle in the weeks leading up to Valentine's Day that George started taking off his color correction goggles just to give his eyes an occasional break.

"What the *hell* are those?" he exclaimed one day upon entering the library with Dream to see what appeared to be several winged naked babies flying above the tables.

Dream barely batted an eye. "Oh, those? Those are cherubs," he supplied.

"Cherubs?"

"They're pretty common around Valentine's Day," Dream said amusedly. "I guess the staff are trying out new decorations this year."

George huffed and took his seat at their usual table in the back all while eyeing the flying entities with suspicion.

"Are they real babies?" he asked Dream skeptically, making the other boy laugh.

"Are they *real*—? Of course not, you idiot!" he snickered. "Real babies don't have *wings*."

"You know what I meant!"

"They're enchanted statues," the Slytherin explained as he took his own seat across from George. "They can say basic sentences and throw flower petals at people, but that's about it."

As if on cue, one of the cherubs swooped down and unceremoniously flung a handful of rose petals at each of the boys' heads.

"*Love is in the air!*" it exclaimed in a stupidly high pitched voice. "*Rose petals for another happy Hogwarts couple!*"

George and Dream both spluttered and looked at the cherub with wide eyes.

“We’re not—”

“We aren’t—”

“*Roses are red, violets are blue...*” the cherub sang, flying off to the next table.

A few beats of awkward silence passed between them, only broken when Dream reached across the table and plucked something from George’s hair.

“What are you—? Oh,” George cut off once he saw a single red rose petal held pinched between two of Dream’s fingers.

Dream smirked and set it down on the table.

“You, uh, had a...” Dream trailed off, nodding at the flower petal, “in your...”

George laughed awkwardly. “Oh, ha. Thanks.”

“No problem,” Dream replied.

George bit his lip. Dream looked like he wanted to say something else, but the sound of Madame Pince shushing a table of older students snapped him out of it.

“So, uh, why did we come here again? To study?” the blond asked, reaching into his bag for his textbooks.

George’s shoulders untensed and he nodded in reply. “Yes. Ancient Runes homework.”

“Right. What page?”

They worked for several hours until they got tired of brushing flower petals off of their desk, at which point it was time for dinner. They left the library chatting and bantering as usual, all of the earlier cherub weirdness forgotten.

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On the morning of Valentine’s Day, George woke up to the sound of his roommate’s cackling.

“Wha’sat?” he mumbled sleepily, craning his neck up to see what all of the commotion was about.

He made a motion to get up but was stopped when Wilbur suddenly leapt across the room and dove under his covers, jostling his bed frame in the process.

“Gogi, save me!” Wilbur squealed, burying his lanky frame under the duvet. “Techno is going to kill me!”

George blinked the sleep out of his eyes and sat up in time to see the very roommate in question storm out of their bathroom with his fists balled at his side and smoke practically shooting out of his ears.

“So, ya think you’re funny or somethin?” Techno asked through gritted teeth, gesturing pointedly to the top of his head. “Y’think *this* is funny?”

George felt Wilbur squirm beside him as he reached over to his bedside table and groggily put on

his color correction glasses. The second the colors slid into focus, a gasp escaped from his lips as he took in the sight of Technoblade standing before him.

The mop of shaggy brown hair that his roommate previously sported was now dyed a pale, pastel pink.

“*Well?* Don’t get cold feet now, Wil, ya gotta answer for your crimes!” Techno spat, stomping over to the obvious Wilbur-shaped lump under George’s sheets and dragging the shrieking boy out from underneath them.

“It wasn’t me!” Wilbur cried, clutching onto George’s bed frame as Techno attempted to throw him out of their open window.

“‘Who wishes to fight must first count the cost,’ Wilbur! You asked for this! You knew this would happen!”

“No!

“You did this to yourself!”

“Gogi, save me, please!” Wilbur pleaded, reaching out towards George with a desperate look on his face.

George took one look at Techno’s murderous face and decided that helping Wilbur was decidedly *not* in his best interest if he wanted to stay alive.

“Erm, a-actually it looks like the bathroom’s free right now so...” he nodded his head in the direction of their shared bathroom and slowly started to back away from the other two boys.

“How could you abandon me in my moment of need?!”

“Die!” Technoblade yelled.

Suddenly, the door to the dorm room burst open.

“Would you lot quiet *down?!* ” Philza yelled, taking one step into their room before freezing and taking note of the attempted murder taking place in front of him. “Techno, what the fuck are you doin?”

“He’s trying to kill me!” Wilbur wailed.

“Yeah, I can fuckin see that, but why?”

Techno narrowed his eyes at the seventh-year. “*Why, Philza? Why?!* ” he repeated incredulously, releasing his grip on Wilbur and sending the curly haired boy crashing to the ground. “Do you not *see my hair?!* ”

Philza glanced up at the seething third-year’s head and shrugged. “Yeah, ‘s a good look on ya, didn’t really answer my question.”

“He did this to me!” Techno yelled, pointing an accusatory finger in Wilbur’s direction as the curly haired boy tried and failed to hide himself under George’s bed.

“And your solution was to wake up th’ whole Ravenclaw Tower with your screamin?” Phil sighed, punching the bridge of his nose. “C’mon, Techno, mate, you know better than that. ’Sides, didncha wanna dye your hair pink anyways?”

Something unreadable flashed across Techno's face as he tore his eyes away from Wilbur to look at Philza. "I... *did* mention it once...."

"See? So he was doin ya a favor!" Philza declared, clapping Techno on the shoulder. "You should be thankin im, not killin im, now go on n'—"

"I mentioned it *once*, Phil," Techno emphasized. "Do you know when that was?"

Philza furrowed his eyebrows. "Uh, no?"

"It was on the Hogwarts Express and only a few people were there in our compartment. I distinctly remember that you were *not* one of those people. Do you know what else was mentioned there?"

"Somethin that's gonna incriminate me further, I'm guessin?" Philza chuckled.

"Eret mentioned that the specific spell meant to achieve *this* —" he tugged at his hair, "is only taught in the *sixth* year!"

Phil grinned, inspecting Techno's hair up close. "Oh yeah, it is, isn't it? And that's not a bad job, if I do say so myself. Definitely not somethin Wilbur could pull off."

"Hey!" Wilbur called indignantly, quickly quieting down when Techno shot him a look.

"So, detective, have ya figured it out? Can I go back t' sleep now?" Phil asked, a bemused expression on his face.

Techno glared at him for a second before tearing his eyes away and running a hand through his newly dyed hair. "Yeah..." he muttered.

"There we go," the seventh-year squeezed his shoulder in reassurance. "'And quit frownin like that, right? The color really *does* look good." Phil reached into his sleeve, then, and pulled out his wand. "But if it bothers ya *that* bad, I'll reverse it for ya. 'S not funny if you're just uncomfortable."

Techno considered the suggestion for a moment before shaking his head. "Nah, if *you* did it then it's good. I actually kinda like it, it's growin' on me."

Wilbur, deciding that he was finally safe from Techno's fury, righted himself and scoffed. "Oh, but if *I* did it, I'm deserving of death?"

"Well, yeah," Techno shrugged. "Unlike *you*, Philza can do no wrong."

"When have I *ever* wronged anyone, Techno?" Wilbur asked, crossing his arms.

"Do ya *really* want me to answer that?" Techno asked with a raised eyebrow. "I've seen you come close to castin one of the unforgivables on a ten year old Muggle. You've wronged plenty o' people."

"Tommy doesn't count!"

"Can you two stop bickering?" snapped an annoyed Eret from across the room. "I still have an hour before I have to join the waking world and I would appreciate it if you would just *shut up* already."

Techno and Wilbur both had the decency to mutter apologies under their breaths and take the rest of their argument downstairs. George settled back into bed and gazed idly out of his window. He



knew he wouldn't be able to fall back asleep; not with the looming threat of Valentine's Day hanging over his head.

Sapnap had assured him that the note explaining where and when to meet him had already been delivered to Minx. There was no going back now. As long as she wasn't immediately repulsed, offended, or bursting into laughter, then chances were he'd either only have a mildly bruised ego or a new girlfriend by the end of the day.

George didn't know which prospective outcome scared him more.

~~~~~

The day seemed to drag on. George usually took pride in his flawless note taking abilities, so it was doubly frustrating that he couldn't seem to pay attention to any of his professors for long enough to jot down a single word in his notebooks.

Dream immediately noticed his unusually anxious demeanor. During their morning D.A.D.A. class he wouldn't leave George alone, passing him notes and whispering questions in his ear every five minutes when Professor Travers wasn't looking.

One such note landed on George's desk twenty minutes before the end of the lesson. George made sure to wait until their professor had her back turned before opening it discreetly.

just tell me wats wrong alredy, Dream's messy misspelled chicken scratch read.

George scribbled his response on the other side of the note and hastily tossed it back to Dream.

Nothing, was all the note said. Of course, the response didn't satisfy Dream in the slightest.

"Stop lying," the Slytherin whispered.

"I'm not."

"You are. You're making your lying face."

"What the bloody hell is a lying face?"

Dream smirked and scribbled a crude drawing of a constipated-looking stick figure on another scrap of parchment. George rolled his eyes when his friend wrote the word *Gogi* above the figure's head.

"I do *not* look like that," George hissed.

"You do. Like this, see?" Dream replied, contorting his own freckled face into a pained expression. George couldn't help but snort at his friend's antics.

"Yes, Mr. Davidson? Do you have something you would like to share with the class?" Professor Travers suddenly called out, obviously annoyed by the disruption.

"No, Professor," George murmured, trying his best to look apologetic. Thankfully, his teacher merely pursed her lips and turned back to the blackboard.

After a few minutes, Dream nudged George with his elbow.

"Seriously, though," the blond whispered, "you know you can tell me anything."

George smiled softly and gave his friend an almost imperceptible nod. He didn't say anything else; no other words were needed. Dream squeezed his shoulder and left him alone for the rest of the class.

~~~~~

As soon as evening began to approach, George felt his nerves kick into overdrive.

This was it. The moment everyone had been waiting for. And by everyone he meant his sudden overwhelming anxiety and Sapnap.

Every terrible possible scenario started racing through his mind, at least ten of which ended up with him either being thrown off of the Astronomy Tower or leaping off of it on his own. But the scenarios in which he just ditched Minx and never showed up? Those were infinitely worse.

Theoretically, the plan was simple.

George would meet up with Minx at the bottom of the Astronomy Tower staircase. Then, he'd take her to the very top of the building and present her with "literally the most romantic gift of all time," according to the Gryffindor second-year.

And so, as everyone else began making their way to the Great Hall, George began heading in the opposite direction. Or, at least, he *would've* headed in the opposite direction if it wasn't for his overly concerned best friend.

"And where exactly are *you* going?" Dream asked, slinging an arm over George's shoulder.

"Erm, um, to— well, it's dinner time, isn't it?"

"Yeah, and the Great Hall is *that* way." Dream snickered, nodding his head in the direction that everyone else was walking in.

"O-oh is it?"

"Uh, *yeah*. You're supposed to be the smart one here, George."

George didn't know what to say. He couldn't just go with Dream to the Great Hall; the entire Minx plan hinged on him meeting her at the designated location.

"You're being so *weird*," Dream groaned, tugging on the Ravenclaw's arm and dragging him down the hall before George could think up a valid excuse.

When he arrived at the Ravenclaw table like usual, Sapnap shot him an incredulous look.

*What the fuck?* the younger boy mouthed, pointing to their blond Slytherin friend. George shrugged helplessly and sat down next to Dream, wondering how on *earth* he'd manage to remedy the situation.

A few minutes into the meal while Dream was talking to Technoblade, Sapnap leaned over and whispered something in George's ear.

"I'm gonna create a distraction so you can sneak out," he hissed.

"What *kind* of—"

"Just watch and learn, George."

Sapnap quickly excused himself from the Ravenclaw table and skipped out of sight, leaving George wondering what distraction could possibly be big enough to prevent Dream from noticing his absence. George and Dream *always* sat next to each other during meals; it wasn't like George could disappear without the Slytherin noticing.

Of course, George could just *tell* Dream about the big Valentine's Day plan. It wasn't like Dream would refuse to give George a moment of space. He would probably understand.

*No.*

The idea of telling Dream felt...wrong, somehow.

George chalked the feeling up to nerves and tried not to dwell on it for very long.

There was suddenly a loud crashing sound near the front of the Great Hall. Conversation immediately quieted as students craned their necks to see the cause of all the commotion. From his spot at the table, George could just barely make out the top of Sapnap's bandana-encircled head standing directly in front of the High Table where all of the professors were seated.

*Oh no.*

"Ladies and gentlemen!" the Gryffindor boy cried, his voice clearly under the effect of a sound-amplifying charm. "Happy Valentine's Day to you all!"

"What the *hell* is he doing?" Dream whispered into George's ear.

"Something stupid," George whispered back.

The Gryffindor table burst out in cheers as their second-year did a bow and then raised his hand to silence the crowd once more.

"I have an announcement to make!" Sapnap declared, pulling what looked like a large toy water gun out of his robe pocket and firing bursts of pink confetti into the air. "For two years, I have watched two of our favorite Hogwarts professors pine for each other every single day! Well, I'm here to put a stop to it! Hit it, Skeppy!"

Skeppy emerged from the crowd, a sizable Muggle boombox under his arm. The other Gryffindor grinned at Sapnap's command and pressed a large button on the front with a flourish. Immediately, the famous first four notes of Marvin Gaye's *Let's Get It On* rang out for everyone to hear.

"Professor Travers! Professor Borealis! The pining stops *now*!" Sapnap exclaimed before bursting into song.

The professors sitting at the High Table looked scandalized. Dream stood up from his seat and tugged on George's sleeve.

"This kid is an idiot!" he grinned. "C'mon, let's get a little closer. I can barely see anything from here."

Seizing the opportunity, George shook his head.

"You go on," he said, "I think I'll stay back. If I go any closer I might explode from secondhand embarrassment."

Dream shrugged and soon disappeared into the gathering crowd. George waited until he was

certain Dream wouldn't see him before he slipped away and made a beeline for the exit.

"You can't stop *love*, Headmistress McGonagall! Love conquers all!" he heard Sapnap shout just as he finally entered the hallway.

*Thank you, Sapnap*, he thought gratefully. *I owe you one. Or two. I owe you a lot.*

Five minutes later, George found Minx sitting at the bottom of the staircase. She looked up at him as he approached, her gaze steely.

"You're late," she remarked.

"I'm sorry," George apologized sheepishly. "Sapnap held me up."

"Did he?"

"Yes. I'm serious. He's performing a love song for two professors in the Great Hall right now."

Minx's eyebrows shot up into her forehead. "Is he *really*? That eejit's gonna land 'imself in detention for *months*."

George nodded and shuffled his feet. "Yeah, that's Sapnap," he muttered. Then, with a glance up at Minx, he asked, "Are you ready?"

When Minx nodded, George immediately turned on his heel and began to take the stairs two at a time, stopping at the end of every flight to wait for Minx to catch up.

"Where are we going, George?" she asked, voice uncharacteristically soft.

George merely shrugged. "Thought you'd have figured it out by now, honestly."

Minx finally made it up to the seventh floor landing and straightened up next to the Ravenclaw, eyes taking in the familiar paintings and suits of armor as she caught her breath.

"There's nothing further up except for the Astronomy Tower," she remarked.

George raised an eyebrow and waited for her to put together the puzzle pieces. It took her several seconds, but she soon swiveled her head towards him and gasped.

"Oh! We're going to the Astronomy room!" she exclaimed.

George nodded and offered her a hand.

"About five more flights of stairs left," he said with a challenging smile. "D'you think you can make it?"

Instead of accepting the proffered hand, Minx stuck her tongue out at him and sprinted up the stairs, letting out peals of laughter as she went.

"*Minx!* Wait for me!" he called out before giving chase.

"Fuckin' catch me, George!"

Several minutes and countless profanities later, the two were finally standing outside the door to the Astronomy Classroom. They stood there for a few moments, catching their breaths, when Minx turned and looked at George expectantly.

“Are we going inside?” she asked, voice light and teasing.

Suddenly nervous again, George nodded and bit his lip.

“Um...ladies first,” he stammered, reaching out to open the door for the Slytherin girl. Minx chuckled and started to say something that sounded like another swear word before cutting off abruptly when her eyes registered the sight before her.

There were candles. *Lots* of candles. Sapnap had insisted that when it came to winning girls over, the more candles one used, the better. Judging by Minx’s slack jawed expression, the Gryffindor boy hadn’t been wrong.

It was quite a beautiful sight, George realized. Sapnap had done an amazing job setting everything up. The room’s ceiling was domed and enchanted to look like the night sky; with candles lit all around them, the place looked like a scene from one of the Disney movies George used to watch as a child.

In the very center of the room, beneath the dome’s apex, was a single red rose tied to a sealed envelope.

Minx tentatively turned around to look at George again, an unspoken question in her blue eyes.

“Go on,” George urged, cheeks heating up.

Minx quickly skipped to the middle of the room, her movements fluid as she bent over to pick up the items. She wasted no time in violently tearing the envelope open and dumping its contents on a nearby desk.

George smiled, reminded of the way Dream always shredded impatiently through wrapping paper whenever George presented him with a gift.

*Focus, you idiot*, his brain screamed at him. *She’s reading your note!*

George waited anxiously for her eyes to finish scanning the words he’d written in the common room the night before. He couldn’t remember exactly what the letter said; something along the lines of *I think you’re great* and *please be my Valentine*. Sapnap had helped him with the writing bit.

Minx looked up from the letter and met George’s gaze. George was struck by the fact that, under the light of the starry Scottish sky, she looked kind of pretty.

“Do you mean it?” she whispered.

Not trusting himself to speak, George nodded.

Minx tucked the letter and rose away in her robe pocket. Then, before George could ask her what she thought of the whole thing, Minx ran up to him and tackled him in a bone-crushing hug.

“U-um,” George squeaked, struggling to breathe, “does this mean you liked the surprise?”

Minx laughed brightly into his shoulder and nodded her head against his robes.

“Of course I fuckin’ liked it, you eejit,” she assured him. “And of *course* I’ll go out with you.”

It was already almost curfew by the time they’d haphazardly blown out all of the candles and cleaned up the shredded envelope mess. George walked Minx all the way down to her common

room from the Astronomy Tower.

“Wow, George,” she said softly as they descended the many flights of stairs that led down into the dungeons. “I didn’t realize you were such a gentleman.”

“Me neither,” George replied, his face heating up. “I didn’t realize you were a lady.”

Minx threw her head back and cackled. “Remember when you called me a cow last year?” she asked.

George groaned at the memory. “Don’t remind me.”

“I was going to fuckin’ murder you!”

“I *know*.”

“But look at us now,” she sighed. “I won’t lie to you, George, I started to think you were gay with how long it took you to notice that I liked you.”

George coughed in surprise, causing Minx to stop in her tracks and look at him curiously.

“I-I’m not *gay*,” he spluttered once he’d gotten past the shock of Minx’s words. “Wh...why would I be *gay*? ”

Minx smirked. “Did ye just ask me *why* you would be *gay*?” she teased. “I dunno, George, you tell me.”

George’s face felt like it was on fire. “You *know* that’s not what I—”

“I wouldn’t blame you,” Minx continued, “Selwyn isn’t exactly *ugly*, if you know what I mean—”

“WHAT? I’m not *gay* for Dream!”

Minx threw her hands up in mock surrender as they rounded the corner and stopped outside the door to the Slytherin common room.

“I’m teasing,” she giggled. “I’m glad you’re not gay for Dream. I like you too much.”

And George was, once again, rendered speechless. Minx didn’t seem to mind, however, as she said the password and gave him a final wave goodbye.

“See you tomorrow, George,” she said, and then she was gone.

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Even though George had *specifically* requested that Sapnap kept the whole Minx plan on the downlow, all three of his roommates pounced on him the second he entered the Ravenclaw common room.

“What did she say?” Wilbur questioned.

Eret nodded. “George, you never mentioned anything about fancying Minx! We could have helped

you!”

“ *I* wouldn’t’ve helped you.”

“Shush, Techno!” Wilbur silenced with a hand over the pink haired boy’s mouth. “George, how did it go? How are you still *alive*?”

“Yes! Did she try to bite your head off?” Eret pressed.

George threw up his hands and pushed his way through his eager roommates without saying a word. They followed him all the way up the boys’ staircase and into their dorm room, where George finally turned around and faced them with his hands on his hips.

“Well?” Wilbur demanded.

George sighed, running a hand through his dark hair before answering.

“She said yes.”

Eret and Wilbur immediately began clapping and jumping around excitedly while Techno just shrugged and left to use the bathroom.

“How did you ask her, mate?”

“ *Where* did you ask her?”

“What were her *exact* words?”

“Did you two kiss?”

George blanched at the question and immediately clapped his hands over his ears.

“Shut up! No, no, no kissing involved, please stop with the questions!” he pleaded, turning away to hide the blush on his face. He only let himself untense when he felt Wilbur place a hand on his shoulder.

“Sorry, George,” the curly haired boy said. “We’re just honestly happy for you. We knew Minx fancied you, but we didn’t think you fancied her back.”

“Yeah,” Eret added, “she even asked me if you were gay.”

George groaned at the comment. “What is with all of the *gay*? I’m not *gay*!”

Eret raised an eyebrow. “It’s not an insult, you know. She was just wondering. There’s nothing wrong with liking guys.”

Wilbur nodded earnestly. “Nothing whatsoever!”

“I might even be a little gay, to be honest.”

“Wait, really, Eret?” Wilbur asked.

“Yeah,” Eret shrugged. “But it’s weird, because I’m not, like, *gay* gay. I still like girls.”

“There are different *levels* of gay?” George asked incredulously.

Wilbur gasped, then, and looked Eret in the eye excitedly.

“I know!” he exclaimed, “you’re bisexual! Isn’t that what it’s called when you fancy both?”

“You know, that *does* sound right, Wilbur!”

“Can you three go be gay somewhere *else*? ” Techno said as he stepped out of the bathroom. “I have to wake up early tomorrow for quidditch, and you’re talkin’ pretty loudly.”

Wilbur and Eret apologized and took their conversation downstairs into the common room, leaving George to get ready for bed by himself. As he brushed his teeth, an anxiety-provoking thought occurred to him.

If Sapnap told his roommates, Dream probably knew about Minx, as well.

It was hard for George to get to sleep that night.

~~~~~

Being half of a Hogwarts couple was weird.

In spite of what the huge castle would have one think, Hogwarts wasn’t *that* large of an institution. As a result, news spread like wildfire among the student body. George wasn’t used to having so many people suddenly asking him how his life was and attempting to make small talk in the halls. The sudden attention made him feel both flattered and uncomfortable.

But the sudden surge of popularity was an easy problem to handle in comparison to George’s other one. A problem which he hadn’t anticipated at all was Dream being mad at him.

George knew that something was wrong the second that he stepped into his first Potions lesson after Valentine’s Day. Dream, who had sat next to George in Potions every lesson without fail for three years in a row, was no longer seated in his usual spot in the back row, having instead opted for a seat at the front of the room.

When George’s eyes landed on Dream’s usual seat, he found a blue-eyed Slytherin girl staring up at him expectantly.

“Minx?” he said hesitantly as he set his things down on his desk.

Minx smiled brightly at him and gestured for him to hurry up and sit down.

“Dream agreed to swap seats with me, Georgie!” she exclaimed happily. “We can sit together in our classes, now!”

“Um...” George glanced at the aforementioned blond boy, who was speaking casually with Eret at the front of the room.

Minx, following his line of sight, huffed and crossed her arms.

“Aren’t you *pleased*, George?” she questioned, sounding somewhat offended. “You get to sit with your *girlfriend*, now. You should be fuckin’ ecstatic.”

George’s eyes widened and he nodded vigorously. “O-of course I’m pleased!” he stuttered. “I-This is brilliant, Minx.”

Minx raised an eyebrow. “If it’s too *soon* for you, or whatever, I can fuckin’ move.”

“N-no! It’s fine. Really. I was just...” George trailed off and bit his lip, wondering how to phrase



the next part of his sentence. "I was just nervous that Dream might be cross with me, that's all."

"Oh," Minx said, shoulders untensing. "Don't worry, Georgie, I wouldn't have kicked the fucker out of his seat. Selwyn's the one who offered to switch."

*Dream was the one who offered?* George's brain thought, suddenly worried.

Out loud, he said, "Oh, perfect. That's fine, then."

He spent the rest of the lesson exchanging forced smiles with Minx and staring anxiously at the back of his best friend's head. When the bell finally rang, George leapt out of his seat and immediately cornered Dream outside in the hallway.

"Dream," he called out to his rapidly retreating friend, "wait."

Thankfully, Dream turned around to face him. The blond's face was a mask of cool indifference, an expression usually reserved only for obnoxious teachers and Selwyn Sr.

George gulped nervously. Dream raised an eyebrow.

"What?" the Slytherin said as if it were completely *normal* for the two of them to go an entire lesson without exchanging a single word.

George forced his nerves down and stood up a little straighter. "Why didn't you sit next to me?" he questioned. "We always sit together."

Dream's expression didn't shift at all as he answered, "I was being polite."

"How is sitting somewhere else *polite*?"

"I let you sit next to your *girlfriend*, George. You should be thanking me."

George flinched. The way Dream stressed the word *girlfriend* made his stomach churn. When the Ravenclaw didn't say anything else, Dream made to turn around and leave.

"Wait!" George called out, "where are you going? It's lunch time. The Great Hall's the other way."

Dream didn't look back at George when he replied, "I'm gonna go feed Patches. Don't wait up."

~~~~~

Dream sat with Bad and Karl at the Hufflepuff table for both lunch *and* dinner that day.

And the next day, and the day after that.

George wanted to confront him, wanted to scream in frustration at his best friend who was suddenly acting like George had murdered his cat. Perhaps he *would* have approached Dream if Minx weren't always glued to his side.

The thing about girlfriends, George realized, was that they were needy. Minx always wanted to sit

next to him and talk to him and study with him in the library. She even tried to follow him into the Ravenclaw common room, once.

It was a *lot*, and George often found himself questioning why anyone would want a girlfriend in the first place.

It was an entire week before Dream sat with the Ravenclaws again. George was happy, at first, instinctively moving over to make space for the Slytherin before realizing that Dream intended to sit between Techno and Wilbur.

“Dream!” Wilbur exclaimed, oblivious to the sudden tension between the two best friends. “Haven’t seen you in a while. How’s Baddeus?”

“Good,” Dream replied nonchalantly. “He’s hoping Professor Sprout will recommend him for Hufflepuff Prefect next year.”

Techno snorted. “Imagine *wantin’* to be Prefect.”

Eret looked at his roommate incredulously. “Techno, it looks bloody great on a resume. *And* you get so many privileges!”

“That’s right!” Wilbur realized. “You get to bathe in the Prefect’s bathroom!”

“Oh, please,” the pink haired boy scoffed dismissively, “Prefects are all just tools in an oppressive system. They’re glorified tyrants.”

“Isn’t Philza a prefect?” George muttered.

“Philza obviously doesn’t count.” Techno snapped, shooting him a look, “He isn’t an *actual* prefect, he’s not a slave to the system, he just holds that title as a formality. If it wasn’t him, it’d have to be some other stuck up snob that’d just abuse and exploit his powers.”

George had more than a few vivid memories of Philza threatening to use his ‘prefect powers’ to get the third-years to bring him stuff from the library or to shut their mouths, but he decided to not mention them.

“Ugh, forget the system for a second, Techno,” Wilbur waved him off, “they have *baths! Bubble baths!*”

“If you want bubbles so bad I could just conjure some for you,” Eret offered.

“It’s not the same,” Wilbur sighed woefully before squinting up at something over George’s head. “Is that my owl?”

George turned around and saw a large barn owl carrying a rolled up newspaper in its talons. In the blink of an eye it swooped down and deposited its parcel in front of Wilbur with a hoot.

“You get the newspaper, too?” Dream exclaimed. “You guys are some *serious* nerds. I mean, come on, who even—”

The Slytherin boy was abruptly cut off as Wilbur’s owl gave a loud screech and aimed its sharp beak directly at his face.

“What the—WILBUR!” Dream screamed as the owl launched attack after vicious attack, talons coming frighteningly close to clawing out one of the boy’s eyes. “Make it *stop!*”

Wilbur sighed and shot Techno a glare.

“Techno, please tell Friend to stop attacking our friend,” he requested while Dream continued to defend himself against the bird.

“Friend, cut it out,” Techno said in a monotone. Immediately, the owl stopped its assault and turned to hoot at Techno.

Dream was thoroughly disheveled. “What the *hell*, Wil?” he exclaimed.

“Sorry,” Wilbur apologized, “Techno’s the one who trained Friend to attack blonds.”

“Its name is *Friend?!?*”

“Well, yes, Dream. He’s quite a friendly bird.”

“Techno, explain yourself!” Dream demanded, turning to glare at the pink-haired Ravenclaw who was flipping quietly through the newspaper.

“Shut up,” Techno muttered. “I’m readin’ the *Prophet*.”

“What is *wrong* with you nerds? Seriously, I can’t believe you guys—”

“*What. The. Fuck.*” Techno cut him off, slamming the paper on the table as the dishes and utensils around them clattered violently in response. “Is this some kinda bad joke? This is absolute— This is the most *blatant* attempt at racial division since the fuckin *war!* This is—!”

“Techno, what is it?” Wilbur asked, his eyebrows knitted in concern.

“Read the goddamn headline!” Techno spat, glaring daggers at the paper before him.

The whole group was silent as everyone leaned in closer to read the print. George had to squint to see, but when the words came into focus, his jaw dropped in shock.

MUGGLE-BORN BLOOD HOLDS THE SECRET TO SQUIBNESS CURE, W.A.P. REPORTS

Chapter End Notes

So get this: according to AO3 statistics, only a small percentage of readers actually leave kudos and comments. If you enjoyed this update, please consider leaving kudos and a comment! I have taken the liberty of listing out the pros and cons of leaving comments below:

Pros of leaving comments: it's free! it's anonymous! it makes Ken so freaking happy! it lets Ken & Grass know you want them to keep writing!

Cons of leaving comments: error404 cons not found

So, in conclusion, please comment!

I love you all so much!!!! 40K hits pog? Honestly when I look at the first chapter and this one I see a world of difference in the writing and I can't believe so many of you guys liked this concept enough to stick with me up until now. This project would be

nothing without your support. <3 See you next update!

Chapter Nineteen || Year Three

Chapter Summary

George and Minx go on a date. Stuff happens.

Chapter Notes

hello hello hello!

I'm back with another update! Gosh, I miss the days when Gra55 and I could write, edit, and post updates every four days lol. University is HARD and real life is soooo busy.

...BUT ENOUGH ABOUT THAT! Please enjoy this chapter and, like always, make sure to tell us what you think!

~Epic fanart ALERT!~

Thank you to esper-eclipse on Tumblr for [this adorable drawing of our boys in the snow!](#)

Also thank you @ttyomi_ on Twitter for [this cute drawing!](#)

And also thank you to @Sometrashy_tato on Twitter for [this absolutely adorable art!](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Needless to say, the inflammatory *Daily Prophet* headline was the primary topic of conversation among the Hogwarts student body for several days after its publishing. And, needless to say, George hated everything about the newspaper article.

He hated the way it single-handedly managed to divide his classmates into sides. He hated the way it exacerbated the tension in all of his classes. He hated the way it brought attention to the *Muggle-born* label that had been forced upon him the second he'd learned what magic was.

George hated everything about the W.A.P.'s research, so, needless to say, the W.A.P. was the absolute last thing he wanted to discuss in his Tuesday morning Muggle Studies class. Unfortunately for George, however, the W.A.P. was exactly what they talked about.

"Let's address the Hippogriff in the room, shall we?" Professor Borealis opened with once the third-years were all settled at their desks.

Sighs could be heard throughout the room in response.

"I know, I know," she continued, "you all have probably spoken at length about current events already. Believe me when I say I am quite...*frustrated*... with the way the topic has been handled by many of my colleagues. Unfortunately, however..." Professor Borealis paused to level her

students with a serious stare. “This matter is out of my hands.”

George’s brow furrowed in confusion at the implications of their professor’s words. Beside him, Minx seemed to perk up in her seat.

“What d’you mean, Professor?” she called out loudly.

George rolled his eyes, expecting Professor Borealis to reprimand the Slytherin girl for speaking out of turn, but was surprised when the professor just pursed her lips and turned to face the chalkboard.

“What I mean, Miss Minx,” she began to answer, fingers curling around a piece of chalk, “is that the Department of Magical Education has issued new curricular guidelines.”

The students stared as their teacher applied the chalk to the blackboard with practiced precision. When she stepped back from her work, the third-years all craned their necks to glimpse the board’s dusty white letters.

Magicology: Lesson 1

Murmurs broke out among the group as the students processed the words. Professor Borealis dusted off her hands and pulled her wand out of her sleeve, wordlessly summoning a stack of books from the corner of the room and distributing them to students with a flick of her wrist.

When his copy landed on his desk, George eyed the cover with curiosity. The book itself was unassuming — dark burgundy in color, its pages bound by ordinary leather. It was the title and byline of the tome that made George do a double take.

New Theories of Magicology and Magibiology: Volume 1, by W. Minx and C.E.A. Selwyn II

George blanched. *Minx? Selwyn?* His head whipped to stare at the Slytherin girl beside him, but she was resolutely staring down at her own fingernails. When George glanced at Dream across the room, he discovered that the blond was similarly doodling absently in his notebook.

“Professor,” he heard Techno pipe up from somewhere behind him, “what the hell is this?”

Their professor pinched her nose and huffed. “Language, Mr. Technoblade.”

“Okay, fine. Professor, would you *oblige* in fulfilling my *inquiry* as to what the *hell* this is?”

Professor Borealis narrowed her eyes at him.

"Please." He added.

With a sigh, the teacher picked up her own copy of the book and flipped it open to a particular page. “This is one of our new textbooks. Our course has been given a new name. From now on this is no longer Muggle Studies; this class is now called *Muggles and Magicology*, or *M&M* for short.”

Some students, particularly the Ravenclaws, looked excited at the prospect of having a new textbook to study. Most people, however, simply looked confused.

“But...why?” Wilbur asked.

“Because the Ministry wants students to be up-to-date with the goings on of the magical world,” Professor Borealis answered, her voice sounding resigned. “Now that the Wizarding Advancement

Project has been recognized as an official branch of the Ministry, its findings are to be given adequate discussion time in class. This new magical study has been dubbed ‘Magicology,’ or the study of magic.”

“Aren’t *all* of our classes the study of magic?” Schlatt pointed out. “This sounds kinda stupid, Professor.”

“*Please* turn to page seven,” their teacher instructed, ignoring further questions. “We are to begin by examining the following chart...”

George couldn’t find it in himself to focus on his professor’s voice with how fast his mind was racing. His eyes skimmed the book’s pages, registering words and phrases with an increasing sense of panic.

The Hereditary Nature of Magic, read one of the chapter titles. *Understanding the Muggle-born Wizard*, proclaimed another. Chapter seventeen looked particularly concerning: *Congenital Squibness Disorder*.

When he looked back up at the board, George saw their professor scribbling something about magical blood types in chalk. The page they’d been instructed to turn to in their textbook featured a table with the heading, *Pureblood vs Muggle-born Blood Typology*.

George felt sick to his stomach. When class was over, he buried his new textbook at the very bottom of his bookbag where he wouldn’t have to see it.

~~~~~

When George wasn’t freaking out about the latest M&M developments, he was apparently being a terrible boyfriend.

“What do you mean, *not yet?*” Sappnap asked incredulously one Friday evening in the courtyard. Friday evenings were some of the rare occasions George got to walk around the castle without having Minx glued to his side. Before Dream started giving him the cold shoulder, the two best friends would usually pass the time by playing gobstones or just talking to each other under the stars, but ever since Valentine’s Day George has had to spend Friday evenings with Sappnap, instead.

“Uh...” George answered, shrugging his shoulders. “Dunno. Haven’t gotten around to it yet.”

Sappnap shook his head in disappointment. “I can’t believe you’ve been dating for, like, two weeks and *still* haven’t taken her on an actual date. What’s wrong with you, dude?”

George threw his hands up in exasperation. “How was I supposed to know that I was supposed to do that?”

“You’re her *boyfriend*.”

“O...kay?”

“That means you have to take her on dates!”

“Well, she hasn’t said anything about it.”

“Because she’s *waiting* for you to initiate, dude!”

George huffed and tucked his hands into his pockets. “Well, what should I do?”

Sapnap raised an eyebrow. “Wow. I thought Ravenclaws were supposed to be smart. It’s a Hogsmeade weekend tomorrow, so take her to Madame Puddifoot’s or something.”

“Madame Puddifoot’s?” George repeated, wrinkling his nose in disgust. “That place is so...froofy.”

“Girls love it, bro.”

“I mean, I suppose...”

“Thatta boy!” Sapnap cheered, patting George on the back. “Trust me, she’ll love it. I am the *best* wingman, like, ever.”

George thanked Sapnap reluctantly before deciding to head back to his common room. When he arrived at the bronze eagle knocker, he found Eret patiently sitting outside the door.

“Locked out?” George asked once he was in earshot. Eret’s eyes snapped up at him and he nodded glumly.

“It’s one of those philosophical ones today,” George’s roommate huffed. “It didn’t appreciate my answer.”

“What did you say?” George asked amusedly.

“Doesn’t matter. Just knock on it already, would you? I’ve been sitting here for ten minutes.”

George snorted and gave the eagle three sharp knocks. He never grew tired of watching the bronze magically transform before his eyes as it prepared to speak. Its metal beak always seemed to sparkle as it came to life, and George found the process mesmerizing.

“*Journey without it and you will never prevail, but carry too much and you’ll surely fail.*” The knocker’s whimsical voice spoke evenly.

Eret groaned from his position on the floor. “I said *water*, so say something else.”

“Water? Why would you say water?”

“Because if you don’t hydrate, you die, but if you carry *too* much water on you, you’ll collapse under its weight. Water weighs a kilo per liter, you know.”

“This riddle *clearly* isn’t asking for a physical answer,” George muttered, tapping his chin with his finger as he thought. “I think...”

He snapped his fingers, then, and spoke clearly to the door. “Confidence,” he said evenly. “You need confidence if you want to achieve anything in life, but overconfidence can be a fatal flaw.”

He and Eret waited with bated breath. After several seconds, the door to the common room swung open, much to George’s delight.

“Hmmpf,” Eret grumbled, “water was a better answer than *that*.”



As the boys ascended the stairs to their dorm room, the knocker's riddle echoed in George's head.

*Confidence.*

~~~~~

"So where are we going, Georgie?" Minx asked as the two of them walked down the cobblestone streets of Hogsmeade. George was under strict instruction from Sapnap to keep the location a surprise ("*it's more romantic that way, dude!*") so he just pursed his lips and forced a smile.

"I'm not going to tell you," he reiterated. "That would spoil the surprise."

Minx groaned exaggeratedly at his words, but George saw that the corner of her lips were pulled up in a smile.

"Alright, then," she huffed. They lapsed into comfortable silence as George led the way through the picturesque Scottish village.

When they were about three minutes away from the tea shop, George felt a subtle tug on his hand. Surprised by the motion, he flinched backwards and snapped his neck around to look at Minx, who was glaring at him and looking quite offended.

"Um...alright, Minx?" he squeaked, suddenly terrified of the Slytherin girl beside him.

Minx scoffed. "George, I'm trying to hold yer fuckin hand."

George blinked. "Oh. Why?"

"Are you *joking*?" she questioned incredulously. "Didja just ask me *why* I'm trying to fuckin hold your fuckin hand?"

George ran a hand through his hair nervously and shot Minx his best attempt at an apologetic smile. "Er...yes?"

Minx's shoulders sagged and she crossed her arms. George wondered what he could say to remedy the situation, but before he could get a word in Minx let out a long sigh.

"Do you...do you not want people to see us together, George?" she asked, averting her eyes.

George stopped in the middle of the street and shot Minx a puzzled look. "What? No, Minx, why would I have a problem with people seeing us together? You...we're..."

"You *never* hold my hand in front of people. Well, now that I think about it, you've never held my hand, ever."

George cringed. He'd have been lying if he'd said he hadn't noticed Minx's subtle attempts to get physically closer to him in school. The gestures were always small — a head on his shoulder while they ate together in the Great Hall, little nudges in the library whenever they studied there together — but George usually ignored the movements in favor of studying or conversing with his Housemates.

Physical affection is distracting, he would think to himself every time he gently turned down her

advances. *Surely she understands that I need to focus.*

But as they stood there in the middle of Hogsmeade, it occurred to George that perhaps Minx *didn't* understand.

It dawned on him that she probably saw his actions as outright rejections.

“N-no, Minx, that’s not...I’m so sorry if I...you know what? Here,” he said decisively, reaching out and grasping her left hand with his right one all the while hoping she wouldn’t read too much into the way he’d fumbled with his words. Minx immediately readjusted her handhold so that their fingers were interlaced, and George fought the instinct to pull back and shrink away.

“George?” she asked, her blue eyes wide and inquisitive. “Is this...okay?”

No.

“Yes,” George nodded. “It’s...warm. A-and nice.”

George wanted to kick himself at how stupid he sounded, but Minx just smiled in response.

“Good,” she grinned. “Now, where are we going?”

The rest of the walk to Madame Puddifoot’s took a tad longer than George would have liked, but Minx didn’t seem to mind the way their linked hands slowed them down. Her expression was uncharacteristically bright when George stopped them in front of the quaint little shop.

“You’re getting us tea?” she asked cheerfully as she peered into the shop windows. Not trusting himself to speak, George nodded.

When Minx took a step towards the door, he halted her with one arm and reached out to hold the door open for her like gentlemen did in movies. Apparently, it was the correct move, because her smile grew impossibly wider.

“Thank you, George,” she said as she stepped inside the shop.

Madame Puddifoot welcomed the two of them warmly and sat them at a table near the window. As George glanced around the interior of the place, he was struck by just how pink and frilly everything was.

“This place looks like a doll house,” he muttered, causing Minx to smile in response.

“It’s nice, isn’t it? Everything’s so bright and pretty and cheerful.”

“I didn’t think you were a cheerful person when I first met you,” George mused. To his astonishment, Minx *blushed*.

“I guess...I don’t really get the chance to be cheerful that much,” she confessed quietly.

George was about to say something comforting when Madame Puddifoot approached them with a notepad in hand.

“What will it be, dearies?” she asked sweetly.

George quickly glanced down at the menu and scanned the list of teas and biscuits.

“Umm...I’ll just have a black tea, please,” he said simply, folding his hands in his lap. Minx

ordered something much more intricate-sounding along with a small plate of scones. Madame Puddifoot soon tucked the notepad away and left to fetch their orders, leaving them alone again to converse at their table.

“You know, George,” Minx said, placing one of her hands between them on the table as she spoke, “I’m really happy you invited me out today.”

George blushed and took the hint, cautiously placing one of his own hands on top of hers before replying, “Me too.”

They made pleasant conversation until their tea arrived in miniature china teapots. Minx made a contented sound as she poured a stream of the steaming dark purple liquid into a small pink cup. George smiled and poured his own tea slowly, giving the drink ample time to cool before taking a small sip.

“Scone, George? I ordered them to share,” Minx offered, pushing the plate of pastries towards him enticingly. George politely declined and sat back to sip his drink, content to listen to Minx ramble about how hard she found it to pay attention in Divination class.

Just as Minx launched into an impassioned speech about Professor Trelawney’s eyeglasses, George’s gaze landed on a familiar head of blond hair outside the tea shop window.

Dream was walking side by side with Bad. Karl, Sapnap, and Skeppy trailed close behind. The group had clearly visited the joke shop together as they were all carrying Weasley & Weasley shopping bags in their hands and laughing at Karl’s hair, which was changing color every few seconds.

They all looked so...happy.

“And so *I* said, ‘Schlatt, don’t you fuckin dare or I’ll tear ya a new one,’ but of course that fucker didn’t listen...” Minx continued. George nodded along, only half paying attention.

For a split second, George saw Dream turn to face the tea shop’s window. His green eyes scanned the shop interior before landing on George through the glass.

Then, just as quickly as their gazes met, Dream averted his eyes. George watched as he tugged Bad down the street and disappeared around the corner and out of sight.

“And *then* I said— wait, George, are ye even listenin t’me?”

George jumped a little in his seat and snapped his attention back to Minx, who was staring at him with narrowed eyes and pursed lips.

“Of course!” he said hurriedly, tightening his grip on her hand. He hoped she didn’t notice the way his palms were just a *bit* too sweaty.

“Hmm,” she hummed skeptically. “Well, then. I’ve finished off the scones, so shall we leave?”

George nodded and waved down Madame Puddifoot to ask for the bill. She returned with it moments later and set it down on their table, along with a little tray of breath mints.

“Thank you,” George said politely as he reached for the receipt. It occurred to him, belatedly, that he would be expected to pay for their date. He tried to brush the worries that usually came with thoughts about money away; surely two cups of tea and a few scones wouldn’t bankrupt him.

When his eyes focused on the total, he nearly had a heart attack then and there.

There were two prices listed at the bottom of the piece of paper. One was reasonable and only a bit out of his comfort zone, while the other was so stupidly expensive that George thought it had to have been a misprint.

As casually as he could, he cleared his throat and slid the paper across the table to Minx.

“I think there’s a mistake with the price,” he muttered. “Is it just me, or are there two very different totals listed there?”

Minx glanced at the receipt briefly before rolling her eyes. “It’s just the W.A.P. partnership prices,” she huffed, as if it were obvious. “Almost all the shops in Hogsmeade are W.A.P. partners. The higher price is only if ya didn’t donate blood, so you don’t hafta worry about that one.”

George nodded dumbly and swallowed.

He’d never heard of W.A.P. partner prices, nor had he donated any blood to qualify for it. Prices were something he definitely should have considered *before* taking Minx on a date, but he figured tea and a few crumpets wouldn’t drain his savings.

The whopping one galleon and thirteen sickle total printed on the receipt told him he’d been sorely mistaken.

He opened his wallet and tried to discreetly count the coins inside, praying he had enough to afford the much higher price. To his dismay, he had only thirty sickles on him, slightly more than half of what he needed.

Swallowing his pride, he placed all of his money on the table and turned to Minx.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized to his date, “but I can’t...I don’t have enough.”

Minx raised an eyebrow. “You invited me out on a date and forgot to bring money with you?”

“N-no!” George stammered, “I just didn’t know about the W.A.P. partnership thing, and—”

“Doncha have your donor card on ya?”

George bit his lip. “I didn’t donate.”

Minx blinked. “Oh.”

“Yeah.”

A few tense moments passed before Minx sighed and pulled out her own coin purse. “It’s alright, I’ll get it.”

George felt his face heat up with shame. “I can pay for my half,” he assured her, pushing all of his sickles across the table. Minx counted out the change and flagged down Madame Puddifoot again, flashing her a bright yellow card with the word *DONOR* printed on it. After a short exchange, Minx stood up from the table and looked pointedly at George.

“Ready to leave?” she asked curtly, nodding towards the exit. George hurried to hold the door open for her as they left the shop, following closely behind her as she led them down the cobblestone streets and set in the direction of the castle.

George sensed that something was wrong; Minx's movements were unusually stiff, and she didn't even try to hold his hand again like she often did when they were together. Even her trademark scowl was frownier than usual.

"Are you angry?" George asked nervously, struggling to keep up with her longer strides.

"No," she replied brusquely.

"O-okay."

Several minutes later, George pointed to the joke shop as they passed by. "Would you like to stop and look inside Weasley's?"

"No, George."

"Oh, alright. I just thought, well, I know you like that shop, so—"

"I just want to go back to the castle."

"Oh...okay."

When they finally reached the castle many awkward minutes later, Minx didn't even say goodbye to him before she darted down the corridor and disappeared in the direction of the Slytherin dungeons. As George watched her figure vanish around the corner, all he could do was wonder what on earth he'd done wrong.

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Looking back on it, George should have seen it coming.

He and Minx didn't speak for a few days after their awkward Hogsmeade date. When George finally told Sappnap what had transpired, the younger Gryffindor was appalled.

"Of *course* she was pissed, man!" the bandana-clad second-year exclaimed. "You took her out on a date and made her pay!"

"She only paid for her half," George shrugged.

"That's still— *ugh*, George, why is it that *I'm* putting more work into your own relationship than you are? Okay, here's how you're gonna fix this..."

That was how George found himself standing outside the Slytherin common room after dinner several days later, a handful of roses in one hand and a poorly-written poem in the other.

*Please come out, please come out, please—*

And, in spite of how pissed she'd looked when George had asked her to meet him that evening, Minx stepped out into the hallway with her arms crossed and her signature scowl on her face.

"What?" she demanded, eyeing the Ravenclaw boy up and down.

George gulped and wordlessly held out the hastily-assembled bouquet. When Minx didn't make a

move to take it, he coughed and glanced down at his poem nervously.

“Erm...well...I, um, wrote this for you. So...yeah,” he said, holding the paper up to his eyes and clearing his throat.

*“Dear Minx, I am sorry that I did you wrong,*

*And if I could sing well, I’d sing you a song.*

*But I cannot sing and nor can I dance,*

*So please give this run-of-the-mill poem a chance.*

*If sorry if I came across as quite rude*

*When I didn’t bring money to pay for our food.*

*I’m sorry this took me a long time to say;*

*I shouldn’t have waited an entire three days.*

*But I brought you some roses here, as you can see,*

*So Minx, please come out to the courtyard with me?”*

When he was finished reading, he chanced a glance up at Minx. To his relief, she was no longer scowling; on the contrary, the corners of her lips looked twitchy, as if she was suppressing a smile. Finally, she spoke.

“You’re so fuckin dense, George,” she stated. George’s heart fell.

*Sapnap was wrong. This wasn’t going to work. What was he even thinking? Why would a stupid poem—*

“But you’re adorable,” Minx said, her eyes flickering with an emotion George couldn’t quite place.

*...What?*

With that, Minx snatched the bouquet from George’s hands and began to walk down the hall. After several steps, she turned around and shot George a questioning look.

“Are ye coming, or what? You wanted to go to the courtyard, didn’t you?”

That was all the encouragement he needed to follow the Slytherin girl up the staircase and out of the castle into the crisp early-March air. There were barely any students outside. It was just as Sapnap predicted: most people were already holed up in their common rooms so close to curfew. The moon illuminated the square with soft, pale light, causing the water spouting up from the central fountain to sparkle.

It was beautiful.

George took a deep breath and reached for Minx’s hand, shoulders sagging in relief when she took it silently. He led her to the spot Sapnap had suggested, a patch of grass a little ways away from the fountain where the shrubbery cast shadows that would shield them from prying eyes. He sat down first, patting the spot beside him in a silent invitation.

“What, you didn’t even think to bring a blanket? I’m just supposed to sit my arse down in the grass?” Minx said.

George’s face heated up and he hurriedly shrugged off his jumper, intending to let her sit on it, only to be stopped by a gentle hand on his shoulder.

Minx was *smiling*. “I was only joking. Merlin, you’re cute,” she said softly.

“O-oh,” George stuttered, slowly tugging his jumper back on. “Yeah, sorry.”

Minx laughed and sat down beside him, tugging her knees close to her chest and tilting her head up to look at the stars.

“The sky’s pretty tonight,” she commented in a voice barely above a whisper.

And George was rendered speechless, because what was there to say?

*Focus. You came here to make it up to her.*

He could hear Sapnap’s voice in his head urging him to say something romantic. The pep talk he’d been given an hour earlier was still fresh in his mind, a bulleted list of lines and actions undoubtedly compiled from cheesy romance films and fairytales.

*If I’m a bird, you’re a bird. No, that wasn’t it. If I’m a bird...we’re both birds?*

He threw the pep talk out the window. If he was going to make a fool of himself, he’d do it on his own terms.

“Your eyes,” George said, his gaze still fixed on the Slytherin girl staring up at the sky. “They were the first thing I noticed about you.”

Minx smiled. Her eyelids fluttered closed, casting gentle shadows on her cheeks.

“Really?”

“Yes,” George nodded. “Blue’s my favorite color. It’s the only one I can see properly.”

Minx chuckled and peeked one eye open. “I’m more of a fan of brown eyes, myself.”

It was George’s turn to look away, then. “Brown’s not *that* special.”

“I think it is.”

When George looked back at Minx, her face was much closer than it had been before. He shuffled a bit where he sat and tried to ignore the uncomfortable pounding of his heart in his chest.

“I was so happy when I was sorted into Ravenclaw,” George said idly, twisting a blade of grass between his fingers. “When McGonagall pulled the hat off my head I remember seeing this sea of blue and just feeling... *joy*.”

Minx chuckled fondly at him and shook her head. “I just felt bored during the ceremony.”

“How?” George asked disbelievingly. “It was so exciting!”

“I dunno,” Minx shrugged. “I suppose I just found it predictable. My whole family’s Slytherin.”

“That doesn’t have to mean anything,” George said dismissively. “Neither one of Schlatt’s parents is Slytherin, right? And he’s your Housemate.”

Minx’s gaze darkened almost imperceptibly at the mention of Schlatt. “Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

Sensing that the mood was souring, George looked around him for a distraction, grinning when he spotted a faint orange glow over Minx’s right shoulder.

“Look,” he said, leaning closer to her slightly to point at the light source, “it’s a Flitterby moth.”

Minx barely even glanced at the insect. “Interesting.”

“No, really,” George said, “it’s right there, Minx! And it’s glowing!”

“That’s what Flitterby moths do. They glow.”

“But—”

And suddenly, before George could process what was happening, Minx’s face was mere millimeters away from his own.

In retrospect, the moments that followed probably only lasted several seconds, but to George they felt like an eternity.

His brain first registered that her eyes were closed — *why would she close her eyes like that?* — before he realized that her lips were ever so slightly parted. It wasn’t until he felt her warm breath fan across his face that he realized Minx’s intentions, and by then it was much too late to gracefully stop what was happening.

So, in a moment of sheer panic, he did probably the stupidest thing he could have done in that situation: he pushed Minx away.

In the blink of an eye, Minx was sprawled out on her back on the grass, an expression of pure shock on her face that quickly morphed into the deadliest kind of scowl. In the short time it took for her to pull herself up into a standing position, George willed for the ground to swallow him whole.

“You...you *pushed* me,” Minx stated, her voice tinged with angry disbelief.

“I-I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to—”

“You *pushed* me, George!” she interrupted him, seething. “I tried to fuckin *kiss* you and you *pushed* me to the ground!”

George’s mouth went dry as he searched his brain frantically for something to say, *some* sort of excuse for his actions.

“I was scared!” he cried, throwing his hands in the air. “I didn’t know you were going to do that! You didn’t even *ask* me—”

Minx scoffed. “Ask you? I’m your *girlfriend*, you arse!”

“It was so sudden! I was unprepared!”

“You leaned into me *first*! You gave me the signal!”



“I leaned in so I could point at the *moth!*”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake, George, no one gives a shit about the fuckin moth! That was obviously an excuse to—”

“To *what*, to *kiss* you? I didn’t even *want* to kiss you!”

George’s words hung in the air between them, and for once it was Minx who was speechless.

“You...” she said, her voice breaking on the word, “you didn’t want to kiss me?”

George shook his head. “No, Minx, I didn’t mean it like that—”

“You didn’t *want* to kiss me. So, what, ye find me repulsive?” she asked, outraged.

“*No*, I—”

“Are you a liar? Were ye lying when ye said ye liked me and thought I was pretty and wanted to be my boyfriend?”

The denial was on the tip of his tongue but the words refused to spill from his mouth. At that moment, the roses that Minx had carefully set aside at their feet made a faint popping noise and began to wither away. Minx bent over to examine the flowers, scoffing when she saw what remained in the grass.

“I can’t believe you, George,” Minx spat bitterly, holding up three rusty paper clips. “You didn’t even think I was worth real roses?”

George shrugged helplessly. “I-I wanted to buy you some, but real roses are so expensive—”

“I can’t believe you transfigured fuckin office supplies just so you could bring me out here and *humiliate* me!” Minx yelled, tossing the paper clips in his face. She looked all at once furious and disappointed and forlorn, and George didn’t know which emotion he dreaded more.

“I didn’t mean to—”

“I should have known better!” the Slytherin girl cried angrily into the night. “People tried to warn me, you know, but I didn’t fuckin listen!”

“I’m *sorry!*”

“I should have known better than to date a stupid mudblood!”

For the second time that night, time froze.

In spite of all the inescapable talk of pureblood supremacy that floated around the castle, George had never actually experienced *that* word. He’d seen it written down, sure, he’d even heard professors carefully use it when quoting texts in class. But never, not once since he’d learned of his wizarding status, had the word been used against *him*.

*Mudblood mudblood mudblood mudblood mudblood—*

The word felt like an arrow to the center of his chest. It travelled from his heart and through his bloodstream like poison, setting his whole body alight with anguish and hurt and visceral rage.

He was shaking.

When George tried to focus his eyes on Minx, the Slytherin girl wouldn't even look at him.

George snapped.

"You *don't* get to say that to me," he growled, pointing an accusatory finger at her and taking a step forward. "You have no *right*."

Minx said nothing.

"You don't get to try to...to *kiss* me and then call me *that*," he continued, "you don't get to sit across from me for more than two years at *my* lunch table and then call me *that*. You just *don't*."

Minx looked like she wanted to say something, but George didn't give her a chance.

"If you really think I'm just a 'stupid mudblood,' Minx, then how about I tell you what I really think of you?" George suggested venomously. "I think you're an ignorant, rude, insufferable, shallow, racist *cow*."

"George—"

"I didn't even plan to ask you out," George confessed, shrugging, "I only did it because Sappnap told me to. I didn't write the note, I didn't plan the dates, I wasn't even the one who transfigured the *fucking* paper clips into roses!" he yelled. "I never really liked you, so you can sod right off!"

By the time he finished, George was breathing heavily and his fists were clenched in suppressed fury. Minx, on the other hand, no longer looked angry. Under the light of the moon, George could make out clear teartracks trailing down her face.

They stared at each other for several tense seconds. Then, Minx ran.

George didn't even look at her as she left.

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Schlatt twirled his wand between his fingers absentmindedly as he lay on his bed. His roommates were once again talking about some shit he couldn't care less about, which meant that, unless he wanted to leave the comfort of his soft eiderdowns, he was forced to listen to their conversation.

Scratch that — it wasn't much of a conversation. In fact, the only person who *was* talking was Eric. Anyone with two functioning brain cells could see that no one else was interested in his stories, but the fucking idiot couldn't read the room for the life of him.

"So then *I* told him that *my* family's manor could fit six of his, an' he shut right up!" Eric boasted, waving his arms excitedly at Dream. "I mean, everyone knows that the MacMillans are a bunch of knobheads. Can you even imagine—"

The door to their dorm room burst open just then, cutting Eric's rambling off instantly. All four roommates snapped their heads in the intruder's direction, locking their eyes onto a disheveled looking Minx. The sight of her made Schlatt's heart drop; her eyes were puffy and swollen and her face was streaked with tears.

"Holy shit, what happened?!" Schlatt exclaimed, dropping his wand onto his bed and leaping to his

feet.

"I fucked up," she choked out, her voice cracking. She took a few small steps into the room before Schlatt rushed over and placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

Dream shot a puzzled look at Minx before his eyes widened.

"I-I'm gonna go." He muttered, dashing out of the door before anyone could let him know they didn't ask.

"Uh...um..." GB80 stammered, grabbing Eric's sleeve and tugging him out the door. "Eric and I are gonna go practice pwning noobs on the quidditch pitch, so, uh, bye!"

"What? No we weren't. Stop grabbing me like—"

"Read the fucking room, you dipshit," Schlatt hissed, to which Eric grumbled and begrudgingly followed GB80 out into the common room.

As soon as the door slammed shut, Minx collapsed to the floor. Schlatt followed suit, crouching to the ground beside her before digging into his robe and handing her a tissue.

She snatched it from his hand without even bothering to murmur some sort of thanks. Not that he blamed her or anything; whatever happened must've fucked her up real bad.

Schlatt wasn't a stranger to Minx's tears. Nobody really was. Minx was a great, shameless crier. The woman could cry on demand when she wanted to, which got her out of more than one flying lesson in their first two years at Hogwarts. Getting Minx to turn on the waterworks and having Schlatt escort her out into the hall was one of their favorite class-ditching acts, in fact.

Schlatt knew as soon as he laid eyes on her that these weren't her usual fake class-ditching tears, nor were they her over dramatic, I'm-going-to-cry-until-you-apologize-profusely-for-something-you-didn't-do tears. No, these were real, honest tears of sadness, the kind that made Schlatt's stomach churn. As he watched Minx sob he was torn between wanting to punch someone and wrap her in a giant bear hug.

He'd do both, he decided.

"I really fucked up now." She sobbed, blowing her nose loudly before holding her hand out for another tissue.

"What the fuck did he do?" Schlatt asked, handing her the whole pack from inside his robes. "It's always the gross ratty ones that you don't expect, huh? You need me to *Avada* him for you, or did you already get him yourself? Is Selwyn gonna find that bastard's good for nothin' corpse somewhere in the school or—?"

"Are ya fuckin *deaf*? I said *I* fucked up. Me. It was all my fuckin fault," she snapped, more tears welling up in her eyes as she tried to stammer out an explanation.

Schlatt sighed, rubbing circles into Minx's back while she choked back her tears. "'S alright, just let it all out 'n tell me when you're done, they're not gonna be coming back anytime soon."

Minx shook her head, "I-I don't wanna fuckin cry now," she stuttered. "I don't even deserve it, I did a really shitty fuckin thing and I didn't even fuckin apologize. I just ran away crying like a pussy."

"Well, you didn't murder his family and then spit on their graves, right?" He chuckled dryly as

Minx rolled her red-rimmed eyes. "C'mon, I know you, you don't just do shitty things and run away crying. You're not a bad person, Minx."

"Yeah, I fuckin thought so too." She gritted her teeth, "I-I really thought I was gettin better, but I'm just as much of an asshole as I was in Year One."

Schlatt's eyes widened. It had been a while since he's had to give Minx *this* kind of pep talk.

"Did- Did you hit your fuckin head or something?" He questioned. "Turn around and look at me right fuckin now." He grabbed the girl beside him by her shoulders and stared directly into her teary eyes. "I've *never* seen someone who was raised the way you were get to where you are now. You've been working hard, Minx. Even before we made friends with those fuckin blue assholes you've been trying to fix yourself. I've seen it with my own eyes. Who do you think you're kiddin, huh?"

Minx tore her eyes away from him, biting her quivering lip. Everything about her posture was screaming that she wanted him to shut the fuck up, but Schlatt ignored her and pressed on.

"No offense, but you've got a *really* shitty family," Schlatt said, making the girl opposite him snort. "I mean, think about all the pigshit they've been drillin into your head since day one! I don't even know *how* someone like that decides to start taking the steps to unlearn that shit. You're fuckin incredible, Minx." He squeezed her shoulder in support. "You're *amazing*. How can you say that you haven't grown after all that—"

"I called him a *fucking mudblood*."

Schlatt froze mid-sentence, throat suddenly going dry. Minx chuckled humorlessly.

"So much for having changed, right?" she said bitterly. "I'm an asshole, just like the rest of them."

"You're not," Schlatt rebutted, shaking his head.

"I am. I wasn't even— *Merlin*, I wasn't even *thinking*. I was just... I was really fuckin *hurt*, alright? 'N it sounds fuckin stupid now, calling 'im a slur because he hurt my *feelings* like I'm some kinda idiotic kid, but our entire relationship was fucked!"

Schlatt nodded. She didn't exactly *need* to tell him all the gritty details, anyone with *eyes* could see that that George kid was being a dickhead. He was the one who asked her out, for fucks sake, and then he went on to ignore her every time they were in public.

"It just felt like he was constantly leading me on! Every time I was ready to end the stupid thing he'd come in with something nice 'n new..." she pursed her lips, "Well, actually, it *wasn't* him. He didn't care about me enough to do shit on his own, it was his fuckin Gryffindor friend—"

"Who, Shitstack? That prick was helping the smurf lead you on?!"

"It— no, it wasn't his fault! Stop tryin ta flip this on its head, alright?!" She spat, glaring at him, " *I* was bein the arse here. Me. A bunch of fake roses and a shite date he didn't even pay for shouldn't've been enough for me ta stick around like some kinda fuckin sissy. I shouldn't've avoided him, I should've broken up with him a long fuckin time ago, but I was being a pussy."

They sat there for a silent second before Minx groaned and slammed her face into her hands, "Ugh, he was just bein' such a prick during this 'apology' date! I couldn't handle it, everyone's been saying he was no good and I shouldn't be goin out with him because he's— and I *defended* him! I told them all to shut the fuck up every single *time* and then he shoved me and it was like he was

provin them right—!”

Schlatt’s shoulders tensed. “He *pushed* you?”

“Oh, relax, would ya? You’ve seen ‘im, he’s so scrawny he couldn’t hurt me if he tried,” Minx insisted. “*I’m* the horrible racist arse. I called him the fuckin worst thing I could’ve called him and then ran away like a coward,” she sighed. “Merlin, I’m a pussy. No wonder I’m not in Gryffindor.”

“You’re too smart for Gryffindor. That House is full o’ nimrods. I’m surprised Eric didn’t get put there.”

Minx laughed weakly and then broke off with another dry sob. “Well, I deserve to be here in this fuckin dungeon. I’m never going to look George in the eye again.”

Schlatt shook his head. “Now *that* would be a pussy move.”

“I *am* a pussy.”

“No you’re not. You’re gonna go apologize to him tomorrow.”

“He won’t want to hear it.”

“Well, tough shit. Listen,” Schlatt said seriously, “he doesn’t know about all the shit you’ve had to put up with in your life. You’ve *gotta* be honest with him and apologize. You know it’s the right thing to do.”

Minx shrugged. “I’ll try. I wouldn’t be surprised if he spat in my face, though.”

“Hey, spitting is your thing. To tell you the truth, it sounds to me like you were both assholes to each other and I’m sure he’s got plenty to apologize for, too. But I don’t give a shit about what Gogi says. I care about *you*, and I know that the only way you’ll forgive yourself is if you do what’s right.”

When Minx left their dorm room, Schlatt liked to think that he’d done alright with the whole pep talk thing.

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It took George several minutes to catch his breath after his fight with Minx. As he gathered his thoughts, the Flitterby moth fluttered unconcernedly around his head, oblivious to his inner turmoil.

“This is your fault,” he whispered to the insect. Its only reply was a faint flicker of orange light.

He glanced at his pocket watch. The clock face read nine fifty-five. Realizing that he barely had five minutes until curfew, George forced his legs to carry him back into the castle and up the stairs to Ravenclaw Tower. He walked on autopilot, barely acknowledging the portraits and ghosts that tried to speak to him in the halls.

When he arrived at the second floor, he ducked around a corner and jumped through a picture

frame he knew led to a hidden staircase. Although he wasn't late yet, the last thing he wanted to do was bump into a prefect on patrol. His footsteps echoed off the stone brick walls as he took the stairs two at a time in his hurry.

He was so preoccupied with his thoughts that he didn't notice the person at the top of the staircase until he walked right into him.

George yelped as he collided with the figure, taking a few hurried steps back in an attempt to put some space between them.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, "I didn't notice you—" his voice cut off when he looked up at the person's face and a familiar set of green eyes met his own. "*Dream?*"

It was, indeed, Dream. The Slytherin boy looked somewhat disheveled, his blond hair still wet from what must have been a very recent shower. George opened and closed his mouth several times, wondering what on earth his former best friend was doing in Ravenclaw Tower past curfew.

"George," Dream said finally, and George realized that those were the first words they'd exchanged directly in weeks.

"What are you doing here?" he questioned the taller boy with a frown, eyes glancing around the secluded hallway wearily. "The dungeons are downstairs."

Dream winced at the harsh note in George's voice, but didn't comment on it. Instead, he withdrew his wand and muttered a quiet *Lumos*, casting the both of them in soft white light.

"George. Are you okay?" he asked, sounding oddly concerned. "What happened?"

George blinked. "Pardon?"

Dream blew out a breath and repeated the question. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I was just on my way back to my common room, actually, so if you don't mind—"

George made to move past Dream to exit the hidden staircase, but the other boy stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"Hey, wait," Dream said, blocking the exit with his body. "George, c'mon. What happened?"

It was then that George realized his own eyes were watering. He swiped at the teardrops hastily, unwilling to let Dream see them fall.

"Nothing," he muttered. "Let me pass, please."

Dream's eyebrows knit together in concern. "George, what's going on?" he pressed. "Did Minx hurt you? Jinx you? Hex you? What happened?"

George groaned. If Dream already knew about their fight, the rest of the school would likely know by the next morning. The Hogwarts drama mill was going to have a field day with the new gossip.

"I said *nothing*, Dream," George repeated firmly. "Let me pass."

"When Minx said something about fucking up, I had to come check on you. Are you *sure* you're good? Do I have to go beat her up now or something? Are you—"

"*Dream.*" George interrupted, all of the hurt and anger and frustration from earlier seeping into his

voice. “Why do you care?”

Dream looked taken aback. He flicked a damp strand of hair out of his eyes and regarded George with something akin to confusion. “Why do I *care*?”

George jutted his chin out and stood a little taller. “Yeah. You’re clearly not my friend anymore, so why do you even care?”

The Slytherin flinched back as if he’d been struck. “You don’t mean that,” he said. “Of course I’m still your friend.”

“This is the first time in two weeks that you’ve talked to me. That’s not friendly behavior.”

“Because *you* obviously wanted space,” Dream shot back, annoyed.

“That’s rubbish. You *know* I’ve been trying to talk to you. Every single time I try to get your attention, you ignore me!”

“Oh, cut the crap, George—”

“No, *you* cut the crap!” the Ravenclaw snapped, pointing an accusatory finger at Dream’s chest. “You stopped sitting with me during lunch—”

“I wanted to see Bad and Karl!”

“You changed seats in all our shared classes—”

“So you could sit with your *girlfriend*!”

“You look at me like I’m a piece of poo on the pavement—”

“Oh, come *on*—”

“So what am I supposed to think, Dream? You—” George swallowed and glared at the blond boy before him, “you *really* hurt my feelings.”

Dream grit his teeth. His eyes were no longer concerned like they had been earlier, having taken on an angry glint during George’s outburst. George might have found the sight unsettling if he weren’t so cross.

“I hurt *your* feelings?” Dream scoffed, tone dripping with bitterness. “Did you ever stop to think about how *I* felt these past few weeks, George?”

“You are *not* the victim here!”

“Neither are you!” Dream exclaimed, voice echoing off the stone bricks around them. “You left me for some...for some *girl*!”

“You’re such a drama queen,” George rolled his eyes, “I did not *leave* you.”

“You did, though. The second you asked her out it was all ‘Minx this’ and ‘Minx that.’ She never left your fucking side! I couldn’t spend any time with you anymore!”

“That’s an exaggeration.”

“No it’s *not*!” Dream huffed. “You know, I might have understood if you’d let me in on the whole

thing. You *promised* you'd tell me if you ever liked anyone, remember?"

"That wasn't—"

"I can't believe you told *Sapnap* before you told me. You told a *twelve-year-old* about your crush but you didn't tell me."

"You're only thirteen, in case you've forgotten," George reminded Dream sarcastically. "You're no old man, yourself."

"That's not the point."

George let out an irritated sigh through his nose and closed his eyes. The events of the day were taking a physical toll on him and he wanted nothing more to crawl into his bed and sleep for a week. He knew he didn't have the energy to carry the argument on for much longer.

"I'm done talking to you, Dream," he muttered. "Let me up to my common room."

"No."

"If you don't move, I'll hex you."

"I'd like to see you try, you stupid m—"

"*Stupefy!*"

The spell tumbled from George's lips reflexively, red light flashing by his wand tip and hitting Dream squarely in the chest. The taller boy fell to the floor in a heap, unconscious.

George, upon realizing what he'd done, let his wand clatter to the floor.

"You *don't* get to say that to me," he whispered into the dark, sliding down the wall and taking a seat on the stone steps. "Y-you d-don't get to..."

Minutes passed. Dream remained unmoving aside from the steady rise and fall of his chest. George contemplated leaving him there until he woke up on his own, but couldn't bring himself to move.

*You stupid mudblood. Mudblood, mudblood, mudblood—*

Had Dream really been about to say it?

It took the Slytherin fifteen minutes to finally stir. George watched with trepidation as his eyelids fluttered and his fingers twitched.

"Eugh...George?" Dream groaned, rolling over onto his side and peeking one green eye open.

George wordlessly met his gaze, blinking away a fresh wave of tears. In spite of his best efforts, the traitorous droplets spilled down his cheeks.

"Are you...crying?" Dream asked, pulling himself up into a sitting position. "Why are *you* crying when you're the one who just stunned me?"

"You were—" George hiccuped and wiped the tears away with his sleeve. "I...you...you were going t-to call me a..." he cut off, the word catching in his throat and choking him.

Dream looked confused. "I was gonna call you a stupid moron, cuz you *are*. Did you *really* have to



stun me like that? Jeez.” Dream paused and rubbed the back of his head with a wince. “Darn, that hurt.”

“A m-moron?”

“Uh, *yeah*. Did you *also* hit your head or something? What else would I have called you?”

George tried to stop the tears, but he was too far gone. A choked sob left his lips and he wrapped his arms around his knees, trying to make himself as small as possible so he could disappear.

“I thought you...” he sniffled, “I thought you were going t-to call m-me a m-m...” George trailed off, voice wobbly and wet.

It didn’t take long for Dream to put two and two together. George heard him gasp and shuffle closer to his side.

“No, no, no, George, I would never...I’d never call you *that*,” he breathed, placing a hand on George’s back awkwardly. “What even made you *think* that was what I was gonna say?”

George took a few shaky breaths and buried his face in his hands.

“M-Minx...” he murmured, swallowing, “Minx s-said people w-warned her not to...not to date a stupid m-mudblood.”

Beside him, Dream went rigid.

“Minx called you that?”

George nodded, not trusting himself to speak coherently. A tense silence followed, and when George finally chanced a look up at Dream, he saw that the other boy looked murderous.

“I’m gonna kill her,” he vowed, picking his wand up off the floor and gripping it tightly in his hand. “I’m gonna fucking *murder* her.”

George’s eyes widened in alarm. “N-no,” he stuttered, looking at Dream pleadingly. “Don’t say anything, please. I was horrid to her as well.”

Dream shook his head. “You couldn’t be horrible to someone if you tried.”

“Says the guy who I just stunned,” George snorted.

Both of them went silent, then, as they heard a meow on the other side of the door. Their heads snapped towards each other and they shared an alarmed look.

“Mrs. Norris,” George whispered. “Filch must be close behind!”

“We gotta get outta here,” Dream hissed back urgently.

“What? Where would we go? My common room is—”

Suddenly, the door to the staircase creaked open. Both boys turned to face the intruder with wide eyes.

“Mrrow?”

Dream blinked at the cat before him several times before doubling over and letting out one of his

trademark wheezes.

“P- *Patches*?” he snickered, bending over to gather the orange and brown tabby in his arms. “What are you doing here, girl?”

George shook his head in disbelief and crossed his arms. “Your cat just gave us a heart attack.”

Dream shrugged and scratched the cat under her chin. “She does that sometimes. I wonder what she’s doing all the way up here, though. Were you worried about me, Pumpkin?” he cooed, nuzzling the feline’s fur fondly.

George sighed, a fresh wave of exhaustion hitting him at once. He glanced down at his watch and gasped when he saw that it was already past eleven.

“What?” Dream asked, eyeing George’s watch curiously. “How late is it?”

“An hour past curfew. We should be leaving,” George answered.

“You’re probably right.”

Neither one of them moved.

George cleared his throat. “Um, well, I’ll just...” he said awkwardly, shuffling towards the door. Dream, thankfully, stepped out of his way.

“I’m still mad at you,” the blond stated, eyes looking into George’s intensely. “This conversation isn’t over.”

George swallowed the lump in his throat. “No, I suppose it isn’t.”

“But George?”

“Hmm?”

The corners of Dream’s mouth quirked up in a faint smile. “Just cuz I’m mad at you doesn’t mean I’m not your friend.”

George smiled back, suddenly feeling as if a heavy weight had been lifted from his shoulders. “You’re my *best* friend, Dream,” he whispered in reply.

“I know,” the Slytherin replied obnoxiously.

George rolled his eyes. “I take it back. You’re awful.”

“You love me.”

*Yeah.*

“No.”

“Well you know what best friends do for each other, Gogi?” Dream asked, expression briefly becoming serious again. “They beat up each others’ racist ex-girlfriends.”

“Please don’t,” George sighed.

“We’ll see. Goodnight.”

And, with a final wave and a meow from Patches, Dream was gone.

## Chapter End Notes

Most people who read this  
Will not leave their thoughts  
Which makes Ken big sad  
(like really a lots)  
So if you are reading  
Pls comment for me  
I cherish each one  
That my eyes do be see.

Uh, yeah, so pls comment. For real though even though I get really busy and don't get around to replying to all of them, each one of your comments lands in my email inbox and brightens my day! It's such big motivation like you wouldn't believe!

Also: I made Twitter! You can follow me @KangarooKenn but I won't be that active. I made it because I realized that a few people were already talking about this fic on there and damnit I want my clouttttt. So, uh, if you make fanart or wanna tweet me or something, I'm on there!

Ken's tumblr: [kangarookenn.tumblr.com](http://kangarookenn.tumblr.com)  
Gra55's tumblr: [extragrassydetails.tumblr.com](http://extragrassydetails.tumblr.com)

## Chapter Twenty || Year Three

### Chapter Summary

George's third year at Hogwarts comes to a close.

### Chapter Notes

Hello again!

This update is loooong. Consider it a belated Valentine's Day gift from me to you :D  
Hope y'all enjoy!

-FANART-

Thank you to @\_mooncat\_1 on instagram for [this cute fanart of our boys!](#)

Remember guys, if you make fanart, TAG ME OR GRASS! I only found the one above because my good friend [Maaiaams](#) (her fics rock, btw, check her out) brought it to my attention. I want to showcase all your beautiful work and give you credit!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Minx soon discovered that apologizing to George wouldn't be as easy as Schlatt had made it out to be. The hardest part of the apology wasn't getting her head outta her ass, or gathering the courage to do it, or even getting George to listen — it was getting past his bastard of a bodyguard.

She couldn't get within five meters of her ex without Selwyn getting in her way. The condescending hypocrite was always on the lookout for her, always ready to whisk George away in the opposite direction whenever she so much as glanced their way. She'd lost count of the number of times she'd been mere seconds away from getting the Ravenclaw alone only to be stopped by that motherfucker.

To say that Minx was annoyed was an understatement: she was fucking pissed.

The shite food she'd been forced to eat at the Slytherin table after their breakup only made matters worse. She couldn't approach the Ravenclaw table without getting glared at. George's Housemates gave her the cold shoulder in the halls. She *wanted* to be a good person, she *wanted* to apologize, but how could she if no one ever gave her a chance?

At least she had Schlatt.

The fucker hadn't even once considered abandoning Minx. The morning after she'd used up all of his tissues, he'd plopped down next to her at breakfast, right beside all the other snakes. He acted like they were a package deal. Like they were in it together.

A few days post-fuck up, Minx decided to let him off the hook.

"Ye don't hafta suffer with me, ya know. This is, like, my punishment." She told him, grimacing as she poked the rubbery eggs on her plate. Schlatt merely snickered and jabbed her in the ribs.

"Aw, what, are ya breaking up with me too?" He teased. "Whose shoulder are you gonna cry on about this one, huh? Pretty sure the number of people who can tolerate you in this school has dropped to the negatives."

"Fuck off," she mumbled, casting her eyes down to her plate.

Even though she hated his words, she knew he was right. In a matter of days, the news of her breakup had spread like wildfire among the student body. It wasn't just the Ravenclaw and Slytherin kids shooting her dirty looks in the halls anymore; just the day prior, a random Gryffindor had congratulated her for having the 'Messiest Breakup in Hogwarts History'.

If her reputation hadn't already been at rock bottom, she would've hexed the bitch.

Even worse, though, were the reactions from many of the older Slytherins. Most of the arseholes were split between throwing I-told-you-so's at her and *praising* her for a job well done.

She didn't know which one she hated more.

Good thing George wasn't the only one who gained a bodyguard after their breakup. Minx wasn't sure what she would have done if she didn't have Schlatt around to tell all the fuckers to shut the fuck up the second they opened their mouths.

It was weird, how their Housemates all respected him. No one except her knew about the complexity of Schlatt's situation, and even she didn't have all the little details. But word in the British wizarding world traveled fast, and all it took for Schlatt to earn street cred were a few whispers from kids whose parents claimed to have seen him at W.A.P. headquarters.

Being involved in groundbreaking government research came with its perks, Minx supposed.

Schlatt nudged her gently and gave her a lopsided smile. "I wouldn't leave you to fend for yourself, Minxy. Shitty food tastes worse when the company's just as bad, you know," he said as he stabbed a charred piece of bacon with his fork. The brittle meat crumbled on his plate.

"So, what, you want us both to die of fuckin food poisonin' before I even get to apologize?" She rolled her eyes.

"If it means Selwyn'll stop looking at me like I shat in his cereal every day then maybe. I still need his folks to put a roof over my head." Schlatt chuckled.

"Ugh," Minx groaned, rubbing her temples. "He's been a pain in my *arse* since the break up. Bloody freckled freak won't let me come within six feet of George. You'd think I was carryin some sorta fuckin plague!"

"If we continue eating here, you will be," he replied, pushing his plate away. "Seriously, my stomach became all delicate from that fancy shmancy edible food. No wonder all those older fuck-muching snakes act all snotty, their small intestines've probably been backed up for years!" he exclaimed. "I feel like the food's *got* to have gotten worse. It wasn't *this* bad before we left, was it?"

"Schlatt, for fucks sake, can we get back to the bigger problem? I couldn't give less of a shit about the food!" she spat, slamming her fist on the table in frustration.

"Really? Because I'm shittin just by *looking* at it."

Minx groaned at the awful joke. "*Merlin's balls*, how am I supposed to fix this?" She huffed, burying her face in her hands.

"The food? I don't think anyone can fix it," Schlatt snorted. "The breakup? Well.... I say give it a few more days."

"A few *days*!?" she spluttered, looking up at Schlatt incredulously. "What's the point of letting us both feel like fuckin garbage for a few days when one apology could probably put an end to this shit sooner? Are ye sayin I should just do *nothing*? "

"Not *nothing*," Schlatt rolled his eyes. "Women are so fucking dramatic. Relax, sweetheart, I'm not having you back out of the advice I gave ya. I'm a genius, I don't go back on my word. Apologizing is *definitely* the right call here. I'm just sayin that maybe the whole 'as soon as possible' route isn't gonna work with lil' Gogi." He shrugged.

Minx crossed her arms indignantly. "And why the fuck not?" she demanded. "Won't we both feel better if I fuckin apologize now and have it be over with? I'm tired of being the arsehole, here, Schlatt."

"You're not an asshole—"

"You're the only one who fuckin *knows that!*" she cried. "Half of our House is complimenting me on my arseholery."

"Come on, Minx, we both know *those* snakes are the real assholes. Since when do you care what assholes think of you?"

"I don't, but you know who else is an asshole? Selwyn. The fucker needs to stop actin like he owns George! The guy can make his own fuckin decisions, he's his own person, if he doesn't want to talk to me then he can *fuckin tell me!* But so far, all it looks like is that *Clay* doesn't want me around. And I'm not here for him."

Schlatt hummed thoughtfully at that, resting his head in his hands as he contemplated her words. "Well, maybe you should tell him that," he finally answered.

"I've been fuckin *tryin* to tell George for a goddamn—!"

"No, not George. Fuck George. Listen for a second," he said, waving his hand dismissively, "Tell *Selwyn* that he's actin like your ex is a toddler— which, for the record, he basically is, but whatever — and that he should back off and let you two work through your relationship drama by yourselves."

Minx gritted her teeth. She didn't want to talk to Selwyn. She didn't want to see him at *all*. Out of everyone, out of *all of them*, he had no right to treat her like rubbish. Everyone else was perfectly justified in thinking her a bitch, but *he*...

She took a deep breath in. No, she didn't want to talk to Selwyn. But she wasn't a pussy. She wasn't scared to confront George's hypocrite of a bodyguard.

She exhaled through her nose and shot Schlatt a look. "Alright, that's actually not a shite idea. You're kind of a fuckin genius."

"I know." Schlatt nodded.

The rest of the day dragged on as Minx was forced to endure dirty looks in every single one of her classes. With every glare thrown her way, her irritation grew. By the end of the day she was nearly shaking with suppressed anger, ready to give Selwyn a piece of her mind.

She decided to confront him in the common room after dinner. Luckily, she didn't need to wait very long for him to arrive. Selwyn strolled into the dungeon and took a seat on one of the armchairs by the fireplace, withdrawing a random book from his bag and flipping idly through its pages like he wasn't ruining her fucking life.

Minx took a deep breath and pounced.

"Oi, arsehole! Get up." She spat, stomping over to him and slapping the book out of his hand in one fluid motion. Selwyn's expression went from confused to annoyed in the span of seconds. He huffed angrily before leaning over to pick his book up off the floor.

"What's your problem?" He questioned indignantly, eyeing her with distaste. Minx tensed at the tone of his voice and balled her hands into fists by her sides.

"Oh, I've got a fuckin *few* of them at the moment, but you're the biggest one."

Selwyn rolled his eyes at her. "What, you're mad because you can't call George *slurs* anymore? Well, sorry to rain on your racist parade—"

Minx didn't let him finish his condescending spiel. "Don't you fuckin dare start with me, Selwyn." She hissed, jabbing a finger at his chest.

"Ooh, busting out my last name, I'm shaking." He shivered dramatically before rising to his feet. He was only a few inches taller than her, but the height clearly made him feel more confident.

"What are you gonna do? You wanna call *me* a slur, too?"

Minx was glaring at him so hard that her eyes were starting to hurt. She had a very low tolerance level for hypocrisy, and Dream's high and mighty tone was quickly testing the limits of her patience.

"At least all *I* did was just say some words," she growled, icy blue eyes burning into Selwyn's furiously.

The boy took a step back and scoffed. "Wh-what the fuck are you talking about?!" He exclaimed, "Just said some words? Do you know what *words* can do, Minx?!"

"Of fucking *course* I know what words can do, you moron! I don't need a fuckin reminder!" She screeched, her fingernails cutting tiny crescents into her palms as she clenched her fists. Time to go feral. "But the damage from *words* can heal, Selwyn. At least I'm *honest* about the shite I do. At least I *know* I was in the wrong. But watchin you play into this whole Archnemesis Dad trope is making me sick. You're worse than me, Selwyn, but you won't even fuckin admit it."

She watched as the words settled over the other Slytherin like a particularly gross, thick blanket.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he whispered.

"You fuckin bet your arse I know what I'm talkin about. You're a *hypocrite*. You claim yer trying to protect George, and yet—"

"Shut your fucking mouth, Minx," Dream warned, eyes narrowing into slits. "Shut your fucking mouth right now unless you want me to do it for you."

Minx smirked. Selwyn was getting defensive; her words were working.

“How are things in Caerphilly, Dream?” she asked him mockingly. “Schlatt says ye’ve been very enthusiastic about the research. *Personally* assisting in the labs, if I remember correctly. I wonder how George would feel about that.”

Dream’s face went red with anger. His fingers flexed around his wand, but Minx wasn’t scared. She knew he was too much of a pussy to hex her with prefects around.

"Stop fucking pretending like you know anything!" he yelled, baring his teeth at her like a rabid animal.

“Careful, Dream,” Minx murmured, her eyes glinting. “Your daddy issues are showing.”

The boy raised a clenched fist and for a moment, it looked as if he was going to deck her in the face. Minx braced herself for impact, turning her head slightly to the side. Upon seeing this, Dream exhaled loudly and took a step back from her.

“You’re a bitch,” he spat before turning in the direction of the boys’ dorms and pushing past a few mildly concerned Housemates. When he reached his room, he slammed the door. The noise echoed off the dungeon walls.

Minx went to sleep that night hoping she’d made Selwyn see some sense. When she woke up the following morning and headed down to the Great Hall for breakfast, however, Dream saw her coming and whispered something into George’s ear which made the Ravenclaw boy scowl. The two of them quickly wrapped up their breakfast and exited the Great Hall together without sparing her a second glance.

Minx scowled and resigned herself to another shoddy breakfast.

It appeared that Selwyn was still a fucking hypocrite.

Like father, like son, she supposed.

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As spring break drew closer, George found himself facing a problem he’d never faced before: he *really* didn’t want to do his homework.

Well, that was a bit of an overstatement. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to do *any* of his homework; on the contrary, he was finding most of his third-year subject material quite interesting. His grades were excellent. The only assignments giving him trouble were the ones assigned to him in M&M.

“Honestly, George, it’s not that hard,” Dream said to him one day in the library. “Borealis is only asking us for ten inches of parchment. That’s, like, nothing.”

George exhaled and rubbed his temples in frustration. Dream meant well, but he just didn’t understand what was so hard for George about their latest assigned essay.

“I know,” the Ravenclaw sighed. “I just...can’t write it.”

“You need help? I can let you see what I wrote,” Dream offered. “Only if you want, though.”

George forced a smile and politely declined his friend's offer. Dream shrugged and went back to reading their Potions textbook, leaving George to purse his lips and stare down at his blank parchment with his pen clutched tightly in his hand.

He was glad to be on good terms with Dream again; they'd both apologized to each other the morning after George's breakdown in Ravenclaw Tower. George had promised not to keep any more secrets, and Dream had promised to be more open with George about what was bothering him. For the most part, they were back to normal.

That being said, there was something keeping George from trying to articulate to Dream why he found their M&M homework so disturbing.

He read over the prompt for the hundredth time. *Please respond to the following question (approx. ten inches of parchment): Why is an awareness of ancestral magibiological differences important? You may refer to the table on page 32 of your textbook while formulating your response.*

The table in question was a blood type chart like the ones often found in Muggle secondary school biology textbooks. Unlike Muggle textbooks, however, *New Theories of Magicology and Magibiology: Volume 1* described so-called *magica sanguine* types and labelled them with an array of confusing symbols.

"Quit doing homework, you nerds," a familiar voice said over George's shoulder.

Dream rolled his eyes at Sapnap as the young Gryffindor boy pulled up a chair to sit at their table. "It's not 'nerdy' to *not* want to fail your classes, you know."

"Sounds like something a nerd would say," Sapnap answered, leaning over to read the title of George's textbook. "Magicology? Gross."

"Gross is an understatement," George mumbled.

"Unlike you second-year children, we third-years have actual hard work to do. Go bother someone else," Dream said.

"Um, we're the same age, you know," Sapnap reminded them with a huff. "You were at my birthday party a few weeks ago, dumbass. I'm a teenager, too."

"Barely," Dream muttered.

"Anyway," the Gryffindor continued, turning to George. "I came to talk to *you*, Gogi."

George raised an eyebrow. "About what?"

"Well, I've been doing a lot of thinking—"

He was interrupted by Dream snorting. "Hear that, George?" the Slytherin chuckled. "He said he's been *thinking!* That's the funniest thing I've ever heard!"

Sapnap scowled. "Oh, *wow*, Dream, you're actually a comedy genius."

"Ha! Hasn't anyone ever told you that you need a brain to think, Sapnap?"

"Why, no, actually, but people must tell *you* that all the time."

Dream tutted and shook his head. "You know what they say about Gryffindors, all brawn and no brains."

“You just called me hot, you idiot.”

“No I didn’t.”

“Brawny literally means muscly, so you just complimented me.”

“That’s not what that word means. Hey, George, what does brawn—”

“Sapnap, can you just get on with it and tell me whatever you wanted to tell me?” George said exasperatedly. Sapnap stuck his tongue out at Dream one final time before composing himself again.

“Oh, yeah,” he said, “so I’ve been doing a lot of thinking, and I owe you an apology.”

“You do?” George asked, surprised. Sapnap nodded.

“Yeah, I do. I feel really bad about the whole Minx thing. It was all my fault.”

Dream coughed out something that sounded suspiciously like *no shit*.

“So *anyway*,” Sapnap continued, “I came to say sorry for pushing your boundaries and peer pressuring you into asking out a girl you never liked in the first place.”

George smiled, heart warming at the Gryffindor’s words. “Thanks, Sapnap,” he said. “That’s actually really mature of you to say.”

“Of course, dude. I should’ve apologized sooner,” Sapnap replied with a smile. “Anyway, I’m happy to report that I’ve thought of *just* the way to make it up to you.”

“Oh?”

“I’ve been doing some research, and it turns out there’s this *super* pretty Hufflepuff girl named Maia who has a huge crush on you! You’ll never believe—”

George abruptly stood up from the desk and gathered his things. Sapnap broke off and shot him a puzzled look.

“George? Where are you going, buddy?”

Without even responding, George shoved his textbooks into his bag and walked away. Before he went out of earshot, he heard a *thump* from behind him followed by a groan of pain.

“You’re *such* an idiot,” he heard Dream say to Sapnap right before he left the library.

~~~~~

Soon enough, April rolled around, bringing with it spring break and a welcome reprieve from academics. Dream was among the first students to jump from his desk the minute class let out on the last day of school, throwing his hands in the air and celebrating his newfound freedom. The professors didn’t even take house points from him for running in the halls; they, too, must have been relieved to finally have two weeks off.

“George!” he called out to his best friend who was exiting the classroom like a boring person.  
“C’mon, George! We’re free!”

The Ravenclaw rolled his eyes fondly as he approached.

“It’s only two weeks, you know,” he reminded Dream, ever the party pooper. “Plus, I thought you hate having to spend breaks with your dad.”

Dream shrugged, refusing to let things as foolish as logic and reason dampen his mood.  
“Anything’s better than two more weeks of Arithmancy,” he replied. “Professor Vector can never *not* make me want to fall asleep.”

“Hey. I like Arithmancy.”

“Yeah, ‘cuz you’re a Ravenclaw *nerd*.”

George huffed but didn’t reply with a snarky comment like he usually did. Dream’s smile faltered.

“Did you hear me?” Dream asked, nudging George in the ribs lightly with his elbow. “I called you a nerd.”

Instead of trying to get the last word in, George shrugged. “Yeah, I guess I can be.”

Dream’s shoulders drooped ever so slightly as George took several more steps down the hall. After a while, he turned around and shot Dream a questioning look.

“Are you coming to the courtyard?” he asked. “Sapnap said he wanted to play Gobstones after school.”

Dream gulped and nodded, quickly sprinting to George’s side again. They walked through the corridors in silence. It occurred to Dream, then, what was going on: George was being careful with him.

Although on the surface everything had gone back to normal, it was still glaringly obvious to Dream that something had shifted after George’s breakup. Their jokes were milder, their time together often filling with awkward silences that made Dream want to tear his own hair out. It was as if both of them were treading on thin ice and one wrong word would send them both plunging into freezing water.

Dream wished he could fix it, but he hadn’t the faintest idea where to start.

*Schlatt says ye’ve been very enthusiastic about the research,* Minx’s voice flooded his thoughts. *I wonder what George would think about that.*

He quickly shook his head to clear it and glanced at George out of the corner of his eye. Minx didn’t know shit. George *knew* about Caerphilly already; Dream had told him months ago. It wasn’t like he was *hiding* anything from his friend.

*You’re a hypocrite.*

Dream spotted Sapnap near the courtyard gates and quickly jogged over to the younger Gryffindor.

“Hey,” he greeted Sapnap. “How was your last class?”

“Ew, shut up. I’m on break, dude. I’m not talking about school right now,” he told Dream with a smile. “Did you bring your set?”

Dream pulled a box out of his robe pocket, opening it to reveal thirty round gobstones of various colors inside. George caught up to them at that moment and pulled a few stones of his own out of his pocket.

“Sweet!” Sapnap exclaimed, eyeing the stones in George’s hand appreciatively. “You’ve got a bronze one. That’s gonna look good in my collection.”

“What makes you think I’m going to lose them to *you*?” George huffed. “My gobstones are going to knock yours all the way back to London.”

“Sure, dude,” Sapnap said with a roll of his eyes. “We all know the only reason you own any gobstones in the first place is because Dream loses to you on purpose.”

“I do *not*,” Dream muttered, crossing his arms. “I’m a Slytherin. We don’t lose.”

“Uh-huh. Hey, do you guys mind if Karl plays with us? He’s borrowing a set from Bad, I think.”

Dream and George both shrugged. A few minutes later, the Hufflepuff boy joined them in the courtyard and they all took seats around the Gobstones board.

They played four rounds. Karl, unsurprisingly, lost all of his gobstones to Sapnap in round one, much to Bad’s chagrin. Thankfully, Sapnap didn’t actually make the Hufflepuff boy concede all his stones; the Gryffindor only kept one as a token of his victory.

Dream groaned when George *also* lost all of his stones to Sapnap, but then rejoiced when he was able to win most of them back during the following rounds. In the end, they all wound up with pretty much the same number of gobstones that they started with, give or take a few.

It was fun to just hang out with his friends again. Even though he and George weren’t quite back to normal, Dream was optimistic that they’d get there soon.

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It rained a lot in Caerphilly.

That was one thing Dream hated about the U.K. Everything was so gray, dull, and cold all the time. In Florida, the rain never lasted long and it was always chased away by the sun.

Florida rain was warm and inviting. British rain sucked the soul out of anyone unfortunate enough to be caught outside.

Not that Dream ever left the headquarters. His father kept him busy with a wide array of tasks throughout the day; by the time he made it home in the evenings, he was exhausted. So much for spring break.

Three days into his so-called vacation, Selwyn Sr. found him watching a few of the newly-caught magical creatures on his break. Several Ministry officials had recently returned from a trip to Hawaii, bringing with them several creatures that were native to the islands. The ones Dream was observing were a group of lava-dwelling fish-like things with whiskers that came out the sides of their heads.

“Clay,” his dad called out to him, prying his attention away from the creatures. “Please don’t scare the baby striders. They’re hypothermic as is.”

Dream squinted into their little glass enclosure again. This time, he noticed that the little creatures were shivering. “Can’t you make it warmer in there?” he asked.

His dad shook his head. “Their natural habitats are volcanoes. We’ll never be able to make it *that* hot, I’m afraid.”

“Oh. Poor little guys.”

“Mmm, indeed,” his father replied absently, noting something down on a clipboard. “I need you to give these sample reports to Gwydion. He should be in one of the observation rooms, I believe.” He handed Dream a scroll of parchment bound with a single red ribbon.

“I thought the observation rooms were restricted,” Dream remarked, puzzled. His father shot him an unimpressed look.

“You’re thirteen, are you not? I trust you can handle a simple delivery task without catastrophically impacting research.”

Dream nodded somewhat sheepishly and hastily made his way down the hall towards the observation rooms, squeezing past countless witches and wizards in white lab robes as he passed. The W.A.P. was a large-scale operation now; the corridors were always bustling with activity, making it a lot harder to navigate the building. When he finally reached the doors to the observation rooms, he paused, trying to figure out which one his dad’s colleague would be in.

He decided he’d poke his head in all of them. It wasn’t like he’d get in trouble for it; the large *RESTRICTED: DO NOT ENTER* signs were intimidating, sure, but he had *permission*. Plus, he was a Selwyn. People around here didn’t say no to Selwyns.

So, after knocking several times on the door to the first room and hearing no reply, he opened the door.

The first thing he noticed about the room was that it was dark. He blinked his eyes several times, closing the door behind him and waiting for his pupils to adjust to the lack of light. Eventually, he was able to make out distinct shapes lining the walls.

“*Lumos*,” he muttered, causing a small light to emit from his wand tip. He wasn’t *technically* allowed to perform magic outside of school until he turned seventeen, but he knew that the Ministry’s Trace system wouldn’t be able to pick him up in a place surrounded by so many wizards. What was the harm in bending the rules a bit?

The small white light gently illuminated his immediate surroundings. There were a few desks and chairs pushed into corners, loose papers and quills scattered here and there. The room was clearly empty, but curiosity prevented Dream from leaving just yet. He didn’t know when he’d get another chance to explore the W.A.P.’s more restricted areas, so he wanted to seize the opportunity while he could.

He took a few more steps into the room, craning his neck around to get a better look at the interior. One of the room’s walls was made of thick glass that opened up to an observation chamber where subjects could be remotely observed and studied. As Dream walked closer to the glass, he noted with disappointment that there didn’t seem to be anything on the other side.

This room isn’t in use, then, he thought to himself. He knew that Gwydion was studying some new

creatures brought back from South America called *blazes* or something. From what he'd heard, those particular mobs could breathe fire like dragons and fly without wings. Clearly there were no such creatures in this dark, empty observation room.

Dream shrugged to himself and resolved to go to the next room. However, just as he placed his hand on the door handle and prepared to leave, he heard an unmistakably human sound come from somewhere behind him.

A cough.

His heart began to beat erratically in his chest. Someone was in the room with him.

When Dream turned back around, he saw two mismatched glowing eyes staring back at him from behind the glass barrier.

Somewhat ironically, Dream was too scared to scream.

The eyes belonged to a person — a creature? — whose face was two different colors. One side of its face was white while the other was charcoal black. Its expression was unreadable as its green and red eyes stared Dream down from across the room. Finally, the creature opened its mouth to speak.

“Who are you?” it spoke in a remarkably human voice. “Are you here to inject me again?”

Not trusting himself to speak, Dream shook his head. The creature appeared relieved.

“Oh, okay,” it said, tilting its head as it spoke. “Is it lunch time, yet?”

Dream shrugged.

“Are you scared of me?”

Dream was taken aback by the bluntness of the question. “No,” he lied, hoping the creature wouldn't see through his bluff.

“You're standing all the way over there.”

The blond took several steps closer to the glass and crossed his arms. “Not anymore.”

“You shouldn't be scared of me, you know. You're a wizard,” the thing said, gesturing to Dream's wand with one arm. “People like me can't do anything to wizards.”

Hesitantly, Dream lifted his wand closer to the creature's face. “You're a person?”

“I think so. To be honest, though, my memory's gotten really bad. I don't even remember how I got here,” the supposed person said, shrugging. “Hey, where am I again?”

“Caerphilly.”

“I don't know where that is.”

“What's your name?”

The person on the other side of the glass blinked his red and green eyes several times before shrugging his shoulders. Dream's eyes widened in disbelief.

“You don’t know your own name?” he asked.

“Nope. I—” the person cut off as his body suddenly began to convulse violently. Alarmed, Dream pressed his hand against the glass uselessly, wondering if he should call for help. Before he could, however, there was a distorted *vwoop* sound and the person disappeared in a burst of glowing purple particles only to reappear instantly several feet away, looking quite dazed.

Dream’s jaw dropped. “Did you just apparate?” he questioned. “I thought you said you weren’t a wizard!”

“I’m not,” the person answered, letting out a painful sounding cough. “That’s just a thing that happens to me sometimes.”

As his brain attempted to process what had just happened, his eyes landed on a bundle of documents stacked neatly on one of the desks by the wall. They had the word *CLASSIFIED* stamped in red across the front, which meant that Dream was totally going to look through them.

Well aware that he couldn’t just *steal* the documents, Dream reached into his pocket and pulled out his digital camera. Carefully so as not to bend any of the pages, the blond took several quick photos before placing the bundle back where it had been on the table.

“Hey, uh, I gotta go,” he said to the person on the other side of the glass, “I’ll... see you around?”

The person shrugged, “I don’t really think I’d remember anyways,” he chuckled, “goodbye.”

Dream found Gwydion in the very next observation room he checked. The researcher grumbled something about Dream taking too long but accepted the sample reports without any questions, something for which Dream was very thankful. He found his dad in the potion room discussing ingredients with a fellow alchemist.

“Ah, yes, that could be a great alternative to fermented tarantula eyes. I look forward to reviewing your results,” he said to the woman before turning around to face his son. “Yes, Clay?”

“I delivered the sample reports.”

Selwyn Sr. raised an eyebrow. “Well, yes, I should hope so. I told you to deliver them half an hour ago.”

Dream shrugged sheepishly and twisted his hands behind his back. “Can I go home yet?” he asked. “I’m hungry.”

His dad sighed and waved his hand dismissively. “You teenagers and your ravenous appetites. Alright, I suppose you may leave. Please do not use too much Floo powder on your way out. You have a bad habit of tossing in twice the amount you require to travel, Son, and I’ll have you know —”

“*I got it*, Dad. I’ll only take a handful,” Dream promised, skipping away before his father could change his mind about letting him go home. The second Dream stepped out of his fireplace back at the Selwyn residence, he bolted upstairs to his bedroom and locked the door behind him.

He squinted down at his digital camera’s display screen, fumbling with the buttons until he could zoom in on the text.

“How do Muggles put up with this crap?” he grumbled to himself as he struggled with the piece of technology. After several minutes of trying, he was finally able to make the on-screen text large

enough for human eyes to read.

Enderman Study № 3

Subject #00029 — Randolph M. Boo

Species: Human Male (Squib), aged 11 years

Day 1 Notes: Subject injected with 10ml of harvested Enderman blood (Type X). Immediate inflammation at the site of injection. Intense headaches reported by subject.

Dream's eyes widened in realization as he processed the implications of what he was reading. The person in the observation room — Randolph Boo, apparently — was a human, after all.

He skipped to the next page of the document.

Day 6 Notes: Subject reports frequent discomfort and memory loss. Daily injections continue to be administered. Subject shows discoloration of eyes and face. No signs of magic.

He pressed a button on the camera and flipped to the next photo.

Day 13 Notes: Subject displays some signs of involuntary magic, namely spontaneous, short-distance apparation. Subject no longer remembers own name. Hair shows signs of discoloration.

Day 18 Notes: Subject has deteriorated drastically. No signs of controllable magic. Termination recommended.

Dream put the camera down, feeling sick to his stomach.

What. The. Fuck.

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Dream did his best to avoid going to W.A.P. headquarters after his discovery. He feigned all manner of illnesses and urgent homework assignments to avoid the daily trips with his father, who, thankfully, was much too busy with work to scrutinize each and every one of his son's excuses, though he did comment on how absurd it was for Hogwarts professors to assign homework over the break.

Dream spent his newfound free time hanging out with George — or trying to, anyway. George was still taking on odd babysitting jobs for several Muggle families in the neighborhood, which meant that he was often busy at the exact moments in which Dream wanted to spend time with him.

That being said, they did make a conscious effort to see each other every day. George found time in between mowing lawns and watching toddlers to sneak in ten-minute conversations here and there. Dream found himself waiting all day for those moments when he could have George's attention all to himself.

The arrangement wasn't ideal, but it worked. They were both trying. Dream supposed that was all that really mattered.

It would have been better if the niggling voices in his head shut up.



*You're a hypocrite. You're lying to him,* a part of him would say.

*I'm not lying to him. He knows I go to the lab,* he would argue right back.

*He doesn't know about Randolph. How would he feel if he knew about him?*

Curse his own brain. Arguments with himself never went well; his two warring sides were always evenly matched, each knowing just what points to bring up to shut the other down.

*I barely get to spend time with him as is,* Dream reasoned desperately. *I can't bring that stuff up. We just started talking normally again.*

*You're selfish.*

And Dream couldn't exactly argue with himself on that one. When it came to George, he *was* selfish.

His selfishness was what kept him from coming clean a week and a half into the break when he and George were both sitting on their tree stump, tracing lines into the dirt with the tips of their shoes. They were finally enjoying a day off together, no W.A.P. or chores or anything. The gentle sounds of the surrounding forest created the ideal situation for Dream to pull out his digital camera and show George the evidence of what he'd found in Caerphilly. It would be so easy, Dream knew, to let the words tumble from his lips and the weight to lift from his chest.

But even though he knew it was the right thing to do, he couldn't do it.

Perhaps it was the Slytherin in him telling him to cherish George's attention while he had the chance, to preserve the pleasant atmosphere for as long as he could. Perhaps it was just the fact that his sense of right and wrong became a bit muddled where George was concerned.

Perhaps he was a hypocrite, just as Minx had said.

"And oh my *gosh*, Dream, did this child remind me of you," George said with a laugh, recounting one of his earlier babysitting experiences. "He tried to manipulate me into giving him sweets before dinner. You should have seen him. He *actually* used the phrase 'it would be in your best interest to give me a lolly.' He's *three years old!*"

"Pffft. Weak. I bet I could have convinced you better than that."

George snorted. When he turned to look at Dream, his brown eyes were sparkling with mirth. "Oh, really? What would you have said, then?"

"Well, for starters, I would've—"

To Dream's utter annoyance, he was interrupted by a loud squawk and the unmistakable flurry of wings behind him. For once in his life, he envied the orderly way Muggles sent each other mail. Manual delivery of envelopes and packages was slow and boring, but at least the mail carriers didn't screech and poop everywhere.

George's brows furrowed in confusion before his expression morphed into a scowl at the sight of the bird perched on a neighboring stump.

"Not this again," he muttered, reaching out and snatching something from the owl's talons.

Dream tilted his head in question. "You've been getting mail?"

“Yeah,” George grumbled, not even pausing to read the letter before tearing it into bits.

“Woah,” Dream said, surprised. “I’ve never seen you do that to a letter before. Who the heck is writing to you?”

George didn’t reply. Instead, he turned to the bird and shot it a menacing glare. “Listen, you stupid bird, I want you to tell her I have no desire to hear from her. I better not see you ‘round here again.”

Dream raised an eyebrow and squinted at the owl in question. It was small in stature, its feathers brown and covered in spots. It was quite ordinary at first glance, but Dream couldn’t help but feel like he’d seen its wide, unblinking black eyes before.

“Whose owl is that?” he asked.

George looked at him like he was stupid. “Whose do you think? It’s Minx’s. Or at least it delivers all of her letters.”

The thought of Minx sending George mail over the break made something in Dream’s stomach twist uncomfortably. “Have you been ignoring her?”

“Of course. After what you told me, I realized her stupid letters aren’t even worth the energy of reading her ugly handwriting.”

The knot eased. “*Hey*. On behalf of all those with ugly handwriting, I take offense.”

George snickered and proceeded to shoo the owl away. It took a long look at Dream before finally returning to the skies empty-taloned. Dream was glad to watch it go, but something about its stare unsettled him.

The owl was familiar. Dream just wished he had the faintest idea why.

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Upon returning to Hogwarts after spring break, the students were thrust right back into the familiar end of the year grind.

On the one hand, George hated the copious amounts of homework and increased academic rigor. On the other hand, his mind-numbing study routine made it much easier to forget about all of the drama that surrounded him at school. The gossipy groups that used to whisper about him in the hallways were too preoccupied with their studies to pay him much attention anymore.

Avoiding Minx also became a lot easier after spring break. Exam preparation gave George the perfect excuse to hole himself up in his common room every night with his textbooks. Sometimes when he was feeling burnt out Wilbur would come sit with him by the fireplace and hum a song he spontaneously composed.

“That’s a lovely tune,” George commented one evening in May as he, Wilbur, and Eret sat together by the fireplace. Wilbur smiled softly at the praise.

“Thanks, mate,” said warmly. “I’ve been singing to myself a lot more lately. Probably because of stress.”

Eret snorted. “Trust me, Wil, we know. The whole castle knows your shower schedule by heart.”

“Hey,” Wilbur answered, “the acoustics in the washroom are bloody fantastic, I’ll have you know.”

After the three boys shared a laugh, George prodded his curly haired roommate with his pen.

“You’re actually really musically talented,” he told him kindly. “Have you considered writing your own songs?”

Wilbur looked puzzled by the question. “What d’you mean? I spend all day writing songs.”

George raised an eyebrow. “You do?”

“Yeah. Look,” Wilbur said, pulling a spiral notebook from his book bag. He passed it to George, who flipped it open curiously.

“Wow.” George eyed the pages and pages of scribbled material. Wilbur hadn’t been joking; nearly every piece of lined paper was covered in multicolored ink. As he read one of the pages more closely, he furrowed his brow in thought. “These just look like poems, though.”

“That’s what a song *is*, Gogi,” Wilbur said humorously, snatching the notebook back. “It’s poetry set to music.”

“But how do you remember the melodies?”

Wil’s smile froze on his face. He glanced down at his writing again before shrugging his shoulders somewhat halfheartedly. “I...guess I just hope I’ll remember them later?”

Eret leaned forward, then, and pointed to something in his Charms textbook. “In Year Five we’ll learn the *Melodium* charm, which can bind sound to parchment. If I ask Flitwick nicely, he’ll probably teach it to us next year!”

Wilbur’s eyes lit up. “That would be amazing!”

George couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Wait, have you two never learned about musical notation?”

His roommates paused and looked at George questioningly. “What’s that?” they asked in unison.

“Oh my *god*, you actually don’t know. Hold on,” George tore a scrap of paper out of his Potions notebook and hastily drew the five lines he’d been forced to memorize for his piano lessons as a child.

“Is this a spell?” Eret wondered.

“No. Look,” George replied, pointing to the bottommost line. “This is the *E* line. If you put a dot here, it tells you that the note is an *E*. Then as you go up, the notes get higher—”

“What’s an *E*?”

George groaned. “What is *wrong* with the wizarding world? Okay, so there are seven different letter notes...”

The three boys stayed by the fireplace long after curfew. By the time Philza kicked them out of the common room and forced them to go to sleep, Wilbur had already resolved to purchase every

Muggle book on music theory he could get his hands on once the summer holidays arrived.

George smiled at his roommate's enthusiasm. He knew that once Wilbur was given the right set of tools, he'd be unstoppable.

~~~~~

Wilbur thought he had a good idea of what a Hogwarts graduation ceremony looked like.

In between asking George questions about musical theory and studying for the exams he'd only just sat a week prior, he'd forgotten that one of his dearest friends would indeed shortly be leaving school. The thought of Phil, his beloved prefect, Head Boy, and surrogate older brother leaving him made his heart twist a bit in his chest.

Time really did fly, he realized. It felt like just yesterday that Philza had welcomed him to Ravenclaw after his sorting ceremony. Three years had gone by in a happy blur. The school year would be over in mere days and Wilbur didn't feel like he'd had *nearly* enough time with the older Ravenclaw.

When Techno told him that they were going to infiltrate the graduation ceremony, going directly against school policy of 'no unaffiliated students allowed' to see Philza off, his imagination had instantly gotten the better of him. For the entire week leading up to the graduation, he daydreamed about how extravagant the celebration would be, what food would be served, what decorations would be hung and what feats of magic would be performed to showcase the skills of the graduating class. Wilbur pictured a lavish banquet, speeches that would bring even the most stoic of the Hogwarts staff to tears, and magical displays worthy of Merlin himself.

As soon as he entered the Great Hall on the day of graduation, however, his dreams were instantly crushed.

The room looked too *serious*. The atmosphere, in Wilbur's opinion, was more akin to a prison send-off than a graduation from the most elite magical school in the world.

The tables had been cleared out of the way, replaced by rows of stiff-looking chairs presumably meant to seat everyone's relatives. There were a couple of benches pushed up to the front of the Hall where the graduates were intended to sit and wait to be called up for their wizarding diplomas. The only refreshments available were mugs of coffee, tea, and random pastries laid out on two long tables at the edges of the room.

"Techno, please tell me it gets better," Wilbur whispered, staring in horror at the sight before him.

"What're you talkin about, Will, this is fantastic!" Techno declared. "We got 'ere before all the families with kids, we're gonna get front row seats!" he exclaimed, grabbing Wil's arm and pulling him hurriedly down the center aisle that separated the rows of chairs.

"Front row seats to *what*?" Wilbur asked incredulously. "Are you sure we didn't stumble across a funeral?"

Techno rolled his eyes. "Stop bein so dramatic. we know firsthand the Hogwarts loves

celebrations," he said, flopping down into a chair in the first row. "It's gonna get better. Now stop forcin *me* to be the optimist."

"Technoblade, an optimist? Never thought I'd see the day," Wilbur snickered, taking the seat beside him.

"I've said two words of encouragement and I'm already exhausted, I don't know how ya do it." Techno sighed, leaning back in his chair.

Wilbur turned around to look back at the front doors, watching as the guests slowly started trickling in. He realized, with a sinking feeling in his stomach, that the procedure was probably going to take forever. Sighing, he resigned himself to observing the people who came through the doors.

"Oi, Techno, d'you reckon the lad who just walked in would be a Hufflepuff or a Ravenclaw?" Wilbur asked, elbowing the boy beside him and pointing towards a tall man with dreadlocks.

"Slytherin."

"You didn't even look up!" Wilbur huffed, rolling his eyes. "C'mon, we can't just do *nothing* while we wait. Let's people-watch!"

"I'm not doin nothin, I'm takin a nap."

Wilbur scowled at the response, wracking his brain for some other form of entertainment. Coming up blank, he decided to go the guilt trip route. "Well... if you're napping, you might miss Phil," he remarked casually.

Techno instantly straightened himself in his seat and shot Wilbur a glare. "That would never happen, and don't you dare imply it again," he warned. "And I was right, by the way, that guy's *definitely* a Slytherin."

"*How* do you always *know*?!"

"Well, I can't explain it if you can't see it for yourself."

The next half hour passed by similarly, their guess-the-House game growing more frantic as a massive influx of people came pouring into the Great Hall. By the time they were sure they had sorted every single guest, it was time for the ceremony to begin.

A group of students holding cushions with frogs sat atop them got into formation. Their conductor made sure each frog was present before clearing his throat and amplifying his voice.

"Please give a round of applause for this year's graduating class of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!" He declared before turning back to face the frog choir.

As soon as the frogs began to croak an upbeat melody, the door to the side of the stage opened, allowing the graduates to file in one by one. Wilbur noted that it was the very same door through which students entered to be sorted in their first year.

He and Techno leaned forward eagerly, watching each seventh-year enter in silent anticipation. When Philza finally stepped onto the stage, Techno gripped Wilbur's arm so hard he could've sworn he heard his bone snap.

"Techno!" Wilbur hissed in pain, trying not to scream and cause a disturbance.

"I know, Wil! It's Philza Magic!" Techno whispered back. "There he is! It's a good thing we're here to help him carry all the awards he's gonna win!"

With the way Wilbur's arm was feeling, he wasn't quite sure he'd be able to contribute much to the award carrying effort. However, as soon as Phil's face disappeared from view, his arm was released, so there was still a chance he'd be able to recover in time.

After the last of the graduates were seated, Headmistress McGonagall took the stage and cleared her throat.

"Hello Graduates, Students, Alumni, Parents, and Friends," she began, her amplified voice echoing clearly throughout the Hall. "It is with great joy that I welcome you to Hogwarts to share in the celebration of the unique qualities and accomplishments of this year's graduating class.

"I sincerely believe that all of you, without exception, are destined for great things and I hope that your seven years at this institution have given you everything you need to succeed in your future pursuits. A Hogwarts education is a very fine thing to have. But it is not sufficient."

Beside Wilbur, Techno muttered something under his breath. A few people began to whisper curiously about the Headmistress' change in tone; she paused her speech, allowing the crowd to settle, before continuing.

"Our world is rapidly changing. Continuous innovation presents us with a host of unprecedented ethical quandaries that we must face. It will be up to you, the future of the wizarding world, to apply all that we've taught you and make the world a better place, whether that be as a professional quidditch player, magizoologist, or auror."

Wilbur bit his lip. It was obvious to everyone what McGonagall was referencing.

"I have no doubt that I will be seeing your faces again soon, not as pupils, but as colleagues and friends. I could discuss each of you individually at length, but in the interest of brevity, I will end my speech here. We will now begin to distribute the diplomas to graduates."

The two Ravenclaw roommates waited impatiently in their front row seats as the graduates were called to the stage one by one. When *An, Yoonseo* was called up to the front, Wilbur realized, unhappily, that Philza's surname meant he wouldn't be called up for ages.

After what felt like hours into the ceremony, Techno nudged him gently as *Maheaux, Martin* was called.

"We've been busted," the pink haired boy muttered. When Wilbur shot him a questioning look, Techno nodded his head at someone to the left of the stage.

There, staring directly at the two Ravenclaw third-years, and looking quite annoyed, was Professor Slughorn. Wilbur watched as the Potions professor elbowed Professor Flitwick beside him, undoubtedly alerting the Head of House what two of his students were up to.

"*Shit.*"

"I know," Techno nodded solemnly. "We might have to bounce."

"But Philza hasn't even received his diploma yet!"

"*Shhhh!*" shushed someone's mum. Wilbur shrank down in his chair and quieted his voice down to a whisper.

"I told you front row seats were a bad idea!"

"Maybe if youda stopped *groanin* every five seconds—"

"Excuse me, boys," murmured a voice from directly behind them. Techno and Wilbur exchanged an alarmed look before slowly turning their heads to face a ghostly Professor Binns who, thanks to his spectral status, had been able to phase through the floorboards directly beneath their feet.

"Hello, Professor," Wilbur whispered, forcing a smile. "Lovely ceremony, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mr. Wilson, though your Head of House has informed me that you were not invited," the ghost replied in a bored voice. "I'm afraid you'll have to leave."

Techno gulped and gave their History professor a pleading look. "Sir, we'll go as soon as our friend, Phil, gets his diploma. Please just let us stay till then."

"Sorry, Mr. Thegmo, but I am to escort you out. Please stand up."

Wilbur glanced around nervously, noticing that they were starting to attract more stares. Even the Headmistress glanced briefly their way in between passing out diplomas.

"Please," Wilbur said, "just let us—"

"*AND GIVE IT UP FOR OUR HEAD BOY, PHILZA MAGIC!*" Techno suddenly shouted, leaping up on his chair boldly. Wilbur lunged forward and grasped onto the piece of furniture as it began to wobble unstably beneath his friend's feet.

"*Techno*, what are you—"

"We're gettin' kicked outta here, folks, so we're gonna be doin this a little earlier than intended," Techno continued above the sounds of the crowd frantically whispering, "I jus' wanna say that Phil Watson is by far the *best* student this school has ever had! This place is gonna *suck* without 'im!"

"Philza for Headmaster!" Wilbur shouted in support, realizing that this was the end regardless, so he may as well get something out.

"That's quite enough," Headmistress McGonagall snapped above the noise. "Argus, please escort those two out."

Filch eagerly rubbed his hands together like a stereotypical villain and approached the boys hungrily. Wilbur held out a hand to help Techno down and prepared to be led away to detention, but a familiar voice caught his attention before he could leave the Hall.

"Thanks, Techno! Thanks, Wil! Graduation's gonna suck withoutcha!" Philza shouted with a grin, standing up from his place on the bench and waving to the two excitedly. "Love ya both, mates! Ya ain't seen th' last of me!"

Wilbur didn't see the rest of the ceremony, but it didn't matter.

Philza knew they cared. As far as Wil was concerned, that meant the mission was accomplished.

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“Ugh,” Dream said to George, peeling off his black robes. “Why is it so hot?”

George laughed. It was their first week of summer vacation and one of George’s rare days off. The Ravenclaw boy’s mum had sent the two friends off to “go play outside and get some fresh air,” which meant that the boys were forced to huddle under the tree in George’s backyard for shade. Dream’s wizarding attire wasn’t suited for the heat, and George seemed to take great pleasure in the way the blond whined and complained about the sun.

“I thought you were Floridian,” George snickered. “Isn’t it much hotter there?”

“England has ruined me, what can I say.” Dream sighed in relief once his outer layer was off, leaving him only in a pair of loose black pants. When he glanced at George, he saw the other boy was blushing.

“Why aren’t you wearing anything?” George huffed, averting his eyes.

Dream chuckled. “I’m wearing pants.”

“Well I sure *hope* you’re wearing pants.”

“I meant pants as in *pants*, not pants as in underwear.”

“Americans,” George muttered under his breath, still refusing to look at Dream’s shirtless chest. Dream wanted to tease his friend about it, but his dry and scratchy throat made him cough, instead.

“We can head inside, if you’d like,” the British boy offered. “Mum won’t mind. We have lemonade in the fridge.”

Dream gratefully accepted the offer and the two boys stood up and entered the house. Before Dream could walk into the kitchen, however, George put a hand on his shoulder to stop him.

“Um, maybe you should just head up to my room. I’ll bring the drinks up,” he said, blushing.

“What? No, I can help.”

“Dream...you’re shirtless.”

Dream looked down at his bare chest, remembering that he’d abandoned his robes in the yard. “Oh. Yeah.”

“Just...” George blushed and ran a hand through his hair. “Just go upstairs. I’ll meet you.”

Dream took the stairs two at a time, only stopping when he was inside George’s room. While he waited for George to return with their drinks, Dream gazed absently at the various trinkets and books lining George’s shelves. He spotted the first chocolate frog card he’d given George for his eleventh birthday and smiled. *Sites of Historical Sorcery*, another birthday present George had received from Dream, was open on the desk, its pages dog-eared from repeated readings.

He was just about to open George’s desk drawer and take a curious peek inside when a hooting noise stopped him.

He turned around and immediately locked eyes with a familiar spotted brown owl. The bird was perched atop George’s bedside table, a letter held in its beak. Its wide black eyes looked Dream up and down before it dropped the letter and began to nonchalantly preen its feathers.

Before Dream could shoo the darned creature away, George walked through his door, a sweating

glass of lemonade clutched in each of his hands.

“We didn’t have any ice, so— *oh*.”

George set the glasses carefully on the desk and approached the owl with a scowl on his face.

“How did it get in here?” he asked Dream, eyes trained on the bird.

“I don’t know.”

“Was my window open?”

Dream glanced at the window before shaking his head. “Nope. It’s closed.”

“Hmmmph,” George humphed, crossing his arms and pointing an accusatory finger at the owl.

“You were *not* invited into my room. Take *this*,” he said, picking up the envelope and waving it in front of the bird’s face for emphasis, “and return it to the sender. I *do not* want to hear from her.”

The bird hooted indignantly and fluffed its little brown wings. George walked up to his window and opened it decisively, gesturing for the creature to leave.

“Go on,” he instructed. “Shoo.”

After a few more angry hoots, the owl picked up the envelope and took off through the open window. George immediately closed it after, double-checking to make sure that it was shut before slumping against the wall.

Dream stood frozen in the center of his best friend’s room, mind racing.

He knew what jealousy felt like. He’d felt it every single day for weeks when George and Minx had been “dating.” He’d resented the girl for stealing his best friend away from him so easily.

Words could not describe the relief he’d felt when they’d finally broken up.

Yet, the feeling he got from seeing Minx’s owl continuing to deliver George apology letters wasn’t jealousy. It was something much darker, much more unsettling. It was like a mounting sense of dread, almost as if the owl itself was a bad omen of some sort. Seeing the bird perched in George’s bedroom without having been let in brought back unpleasant memories, almost as if—

He gasped and clapped a hand over his mouth, suddenly overcome with a sickening wave of déjà vu.

He knew where he’d seen the bird before.

Chapter End Notes

The puzzle pieces are starting to come together...

According to AO3 statistics...I actually don't know what percentage of readers leave kudos and comments. I'm not a math major. What I *do* know, however, is that reading your comments gets me high. It's an addiction that I don't want to quit any time soon, so keep 'em coming! I appreciate every single one (like, really, I obsessively check my inbox after every chapter lmao, just ask grass).

I love you guys! See you next chapter!

Helpful links:

[ken's tumblr](#)

[grass' tumblr](#)

[ken's twitter](#)

[grass' twitter](#)

[grass' insta](#)

Chapter Twenty-One || Year Four

Chapter Summary

Their fourth year at Hogwarts is upon them.

Chapter Notes

Hi guys. Sorry it's been a while. It's been a rough two weeks with midterms and some sad personal stuff, so thanks for being patient. Wear your fucking masks outside during this global pandemic. People are dying.

Phew now that the sad part is over—

WE GOT SOME FANART!

Thank you to Pikachic on Twitter for [this](#) incredible fanart of Dream and poor lil' Randolph Boo. Check it out, it's epic!!!

Remember, if you make fanart inspired by this fic, TAG ME OR GRASS! Links to social media will be in the end notes ;)

That being said...enjoy the update! It's the longest one to date lol.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Memories assaulted his senses.

Schlatt speaking to him, “Hey, Dreamy, looks like you got a visitor. How’d you get in here, little guy?”

There, perched on Dream’s headboard. A small spotted brown owl with wide, unblinking black eyes. An envelope in its beak.

“...Dream?”

George’s voice pulled him from his thoughts.

“Dream,” he said louder, brown eyes concerned behind his dorky white goggles. “What’s wrong?”

And that was when Dream realized he had a decision to make.

Option one: he could tell George everything. He could tell him about the owl, tell him about the boy behind the glass, tell him about the strange things going on in Caerphilly. George was smart; he’d probably be able to make sense of everything much more easily than Dream could.

Option two: he could put it off. He could just drink his glass of lemonade, sit with George in his room, and hang out like old times. He could just...not ruin the moment.

Option one was clearly the sensible choice.

Dream chose option two.

“Sorry,” he muttered, running a nervous hand through his dirty blond hair and taking a seat at the foot of George’s bed.

“What happened?” George asked, drumming his fingers on his desk. “We let the owl out and you gasped. Are you alright?”

Dream bit his lip and averted his eyes. “Yeah, yeah. I’m good.”

George didn’t buy it. The shorter boy picked up one of the lemonade glasses and extended it to Dream as an offering. Dream took it gratefully and downed the drink in several swallows.

“If you’re sure,” George said skeptically.

Guilt, nagging and unpleasant, tugged on Dream’s heart. Not wanting to be a *complete* dick, he settled on a half truth, saying, “It’s my dad.”

George’s gaze softened the tiniest bit and he took a seat in his spinny blue desk chair. “Has he stopped being all nice to you?” he asked, referring to the sudden shift in Selwyn Sr.’s demeanor around Dream’s birthday the year before. Dream shook his head.

“No, it’s just...” Dream trailed off, wondering how much he could reveal to George without accidentally telling him everything. “I don’t like his work. It doesn’t seem...there’s something off about it.”

George hummed thoughtfully and took a sip of his drink. “I don’t like the W.A.P. one bit. But you know that.”

“Yeah. I do.”

A moment of silence passed between them in which Dream thought George was studying him.

“What brought on the dramatic gasp, though?” George pried. “Something about the owl?”

Dream swallowed and met George’s inquisitive gaze. “I remembered something,” he answered.

“Oh?”

Dream nodded. “Yeah.”

A beat.

“Well...would you like to talk about it?” George offered gently. He was so kind, so *understanding*, and it made Dream want to kick himself for being such a coward.

You don’t deserve his friendship.

Dream shrugged and looked off to the side. “Maybe later.”

George nodded. It was hard to miss the way his face momentarily fell. “Alright.”

It took a few minutes of sitting there together before the awkwardness of the interaction passed and they were back to talking about safer things. Things like quidditch and Arithmancy and Dream’s

upcoming birthday. It was pleasant and predictable, but Dream knew that it was temporary.

Because George wouldn't let it go. George would bring it up again, and Dream just hoped that their friendship would survive the fallout.

~~~~~

Dream checked his watch as he waited by the side of the road. *Five minutes past noon*, he noted with a sigh.

It was the morning after his owl epiphany and he was on a mission. The mission entailed visiting a certain wizarding household in an entirely different country. Due to the fact that he didn't know the household's Floo status and didn't know how to apparate yet, there was only one feasible way for him to travel two hundred sixty-odd miles on his own: the Knight bus.

Truthfully, he should have done more research before chucking a few snacks and his wand into a backpack and embarking on his adventure, but Dream had never had the patience for extensive reading. It was something George always teased him about.

Dream stuck out his hand in the air and hoped he'd understood the instructions correctly. From what he'd gathered, one was supposed to stand by the side of a road and just...wait.

No. That wasn't quite right. There was something else he was supposed to do, he just couldn't remember. Did he have to *wave* his hand? Say some magic words? Jump up and down three times?

He groaned and cursed his own stupidity. For all he knew, the Knight bus only came at night.

He pulled out his wand from his bag surreptitiously and clutched it at his side. Even though he was technically prohibited from using it while school was not in session, he felt safer with the instrument in his hand.

"Um...Knight bus?" he called out hesitantly, fiddling with his backpack straps. The road remained empty. "I could use a ride," he added for good measure.

Another minute passed. When he saw no approaching vehicles, Dream sighed and resigned himself to finding some other method of travel. He raised his wand-wielding arm to the air in a mock salute before turning on his heel.

He only made it three steps when he heard a loud, obnoxious honk behind him.

"What're you doin, lad?" a voice called out to him. "Dontchya want a lift?"

Dream turned around and met the eyes of a very disheveled looking man in a ratty old conductor's uniform. He held a wand in his left arm and the doors of a large triple-decker purple bus open with the other.

"Uh...yeah," Dream answered dumbly.

"Then hurry up, will ya? We're on a schedule!"

Once the words sank in, Dream wasted no time in hopping onboard. The conductor charged him eleven sickles without even asking for his destination and then left him to find his own seat

somewhere in the back of the bus.

Dream's eyes scanned the interior of the vehicle. He'd heard a lot about the infamous Knight bus, but no amount of reading could have prepared him for the utter chaos that was public transportation in the wizarding world. An array of mismatched furniture was scattered around the bottom deck with random pieces of luggage strewn here and there. None of the seats were bolted down, something Dream soon learned the hard way when the bus driver made a sharp left turn that knocked the young wizard's chair right over.

"Are there no safety features on this thing?!" he yelled at no one in particular. As if to answer his question, the bus swerved again and sent an older woman flying through the air.

Time seemed to work differently on the bus. Dream spent what felt like an eternity being tossed around like a ragdoll, but when the conductor announced that they were approaching the outskirts of Dublin, Dream glanced at his watch and discovered that only an hour had passed.

He stood up on shaky legs and made his way to the front of the vehicle, a crumpled piece of paper clutched tightly in his hand. He offered it to the conductor who just eyed the thing with disdain.

"Whassat? Toilet roll?" he asked suspiciously.

"No, no," Dream assured him, "it's got the address written down. Here," he said, uncrumpling the note and showing him the scribbled writing.

"Yer handwritin' is shite," the conductor remarked, "but I know where that is. We'll be stoppin' round there in five minutes."

Dream thanked the conductor and tucked the paper back into his pocket. The bus continued to jolt from side to side, forcing him to cling to a metal pole for dear life. After several more moments of swerving, the vehicle came to an abrupt stop that had Dream's stomach churning unpleasantly.

"Here we are!" the conductor announced. "Portmarnock, Ireland. Please exit promptly!"

Dream rubbed his head and eagerly made his way to the exit. Something occurred to him, though, as he stepped off the bus.

"Hey, isn't Ireland, like, an island? How did we drive across the w—"

Before he could finish asking his question, the vehicle's doors slammed in his face and the bus was gone.

Dream stood up a little straighter and glanced around.

The weather was overcast despite it being the middle of the day in midsummer. The Knight bus seemed to have dropped him off by the side of a quiet suburban road. There was a playground across the street where he could see a few Muggle children playing on a swing set, and he was reminded of similar summer days spent with George in the park before Hogwarts.

He glanced down at the piece of paper with the address he'd hurriedly copied off a letter in his father's office.

*Minx Manor*

*103 Blackberry Rise*

*Portmarnock*

*County Dublin*

*Ireland*

As he looked around at the quaint suburban houses around him, Dream found himself wishing for one of those fancy Muggle cellphones George told him about. The one George used during the holidays had a woman inside it who could read out directions to any place in the world. Having a portable pocket map like that sure would have made Dream's task a lot easier.

Alas, Dream settled on getting directions the old fashioned way: by asking a random stranger on the street.

Putting on his best lost little boy look, he cautiously crossed the road and walked up to one of the children on the playground. The little girl looked up at him curiously as he approached her.

"Um, excuse me," he began, clearing his throat nervously, "do you know where one-oh-three Blackberry Rise is?"

The little girl blinked at him curiously several times, saying nothing. Dream shuffled his feet and tried again.

"It's an address," he said. "One-oh-three Blackberry Rise. My friend—"

"Why ye wearin' a dress?" the girl blurted.

Dream looked down at his attire, belatedly realizing that his casual green robes probably looked a bit strange to Muggles.

"It's not a dress," he mumbled, cheeks heating up.

"Looks loike a dress ter me. Ye American?" she asked him curiously.

"Half. Could you just tell me—"

"Yer 'av a weord accent."

Dream huffed and crossed his arms. "*You're* one to talk about weird accents, kid."

Just then, an older woman came up to them and put a hand on the little girl's shoulder protectively.

"Is dare a problem 'ere?" the woman asked Dream sternly. Dream put his hands up placatingly and took a step back.

"I just wanted directions," he said, defensive. "I wanted to know where one-oh-three Blackberry Rise was, but then your kid called my accent weird."

The woman's stern expression morphed into one of confusion. "Thar's naw such tin' as one-oh-tree Blackberry Rise. De 'ouses on dat street only go up ter a hundred."

Dream uncrumpled the piece of paper with the address on it once more, double-checking. He showed the scribbles to the little girl's mom, who shook her head bewilderedly.

"Dare must be a mistake," she said, pulling out a cellphone from her purse. "D'yer nade me ter rin' anyone for yer?"

*Were these people even speaking English? And he thought Minx's accent was bad...*

"No, thanks. I'll manage," he declined politely, turning around and crossing the street again. He could hear the little girl saying something about a *quare American fella* as he walked away.

Sure enough, when Dream walked all the way down the street, he noticed that the numbers on the sides of the houses only went up to one hundred. After that the road ended, leaving only forest beyond that point.

*Well, shit.*

He turned around and took a seat on the curb, contemplating his next move.

He could just take the Knight bus back home. He had more than enough money to afford the trip, but the prospect of having to immediately board that nightmare of a vehicle again made him want to vomit. Plus, he didn't really know how he'd managed to summon it in the first place, and standing by the side of the road and calling out for a magical wizard bus came with the risk of making him look like an idiot to all the nearby Muggles.

He supposed he could go back to the playground and ask to borrow the woman's cellphone. No one in his family owned one, of course, but he had George's number memorized. George was way smarter than him; he'd probably know what to do.

Of course, then he'd have to explain what he was doing in a different country, and that wasn't a conversation that Dream wanted to have over the phone.

He heard footsteps behind him. Figuring it was just another neighborhood Muggle kid, he didn't even bother to glance over his shoulder.

The footsteps stopped.

"...Selwyn?"

Dream turned around and met the icy blue stare of none other than Justine Minx herself.

"Minx?"

His Housemate immediately crossed her arms and shot him a glare. "What the *fuck* are ye doin' 'ere, ye cunt?"

Dream stood up and dusted his robes off before replying. "Looking for your address, actually. No one around here seems to know where the hell it is, by the way, so—"

Dream abruptly stopped talking when he suddenly noticed the giant brick mansion that had seemingly appeared out of nowhere behind Minx.

Minx raised an eyebrow at him. "D'you see it now?"

Dream nodded dumbly. "Uh...yeah."

"Ye didn't think we'd be livin' in the middle of a Muggle neighborhood without concealment charms, did ye?"

Dream looked between the house and Minx several times, confused. "I thought Muggle-repellant charms only prevent *Muggles* from seeing the house, though."



“Ours repel anyone who hasn’t been acknowledged by someone in our family,” Minx explained impatiently. “I’ve acknowledged ye, so ye can see the house now.”

Dream nodded in understanding and began walking up the path that led to the front door. He only made it a few steps before Minx tugged violently on his arm and sent him flying backwards onto the lawn.

“Oi! Ye’ve been *acknowledged*, not fuckin’ invited over for tea!” she spat, putting her hands on her hips for emphasis. “Now tell me what the *fuck* yer doin’ here so you can leave as soon as fuckin possible.”

Dream got to his feet and stumbled towards her, intent on snapping back at her, but a little nagging voice in the back of his head made him hesitate. He was suddenly reminded of their fight in the Slytherin common room from a few months ago when she’d called him a hypocrite and he’d called her a bitch.

It had been a nasty exchange. Minx was *definitely* still pissed at him over the whole thing, which was fine by Dream. He was still mad at her, too.

*You’re only mad because she made a good point*, the traitorous voice in his head piped up.

No. No matter how annoying the voices in his brain got, Minx was still a major bitch. That was an undeniable fact.

*Focus, dumbass. The owl.*

Dream cleared his throat. “Uh, well, you— I came because your owl—”

Minx didn’t let him finish.

“Have *you* been the one sendin ‘im back to me?!” she screeched, eyes suddenly wide with frenzied fury. Before Dream could say anything else, the girl marched up to him and yanked him forward by his collar. “I’ve been tryin so fuckin hard to apologize, you prick! Do you know how much shit my family’s been givin’ me because I keep hoardin’ the fuckin owl because *your* fuckin overprotective arse keeps interceptin my letters?!”

Dream made a noise of frustration and tugged his shirt away from Minx’s grip. “Okay, first of all, *no*, I *haven’t* been the one returning your stupid owl,” he snapped. “That was all George.”

“Bullshit,” she hissed. “He’s not a fuckin illogical moron. He would’ve at *least* acknowledged one of my apologies by now if it weren’t for your meddlin’ arse.”

Dream scoffed. “What, so because he’s not accepting apologies from a *racist* he’s illogical?”

“Stop actin all fuckin high and mighty, *Selwyn*, that’s not what I fuckin *said*!” Tears were welling up in her eyes. “I’m not expectin’ fuckin forgiveness anytime soon, alright? Maybe not fuckin ever, but I...I just need him to *know*.”

Dream opened his mouth, but found that he didn’t really know what to say in response to that.

As much as he wanted to deny it and say that ignoring her was George’s decision alone, Minx was right. He *was* responsible for George acting extra harshly towards her.

Luckily, their conversation was interrupted and Dream was spared the effort of having to come up with a reply.

"Justine?! Who the fuck are ye yellin at over there?!" a voice called from inside the house. From his position on the front lawn, Dream could see the top of someone's head through one of the mansion's open windows.

"None of yer fuckin business!" Minx yelled back, swiping at her eyes with the sleeve of her robe.

"Doesn't fuckin *sound* like nobody," the voice answered. "Ye don't ave a lot goin for ye, Justine. Don't be a blood traitor *and* a liar! Ye gotta pick a struggle!"

Minx froze as the voice cackled at its own joke. She shook it off quickly, though, leading Dream to conclude that heckling was a common occurrence in the Minx family.

One thing did strike him as odd, however, and that was the casual use of the term *blood traitor*. Dream couldn't even remember the last time he'd heard anyone use the phrase in conversation who wasn't a History professor.

Being a blood traitor just wasn't a 'thing' anymore. Ever since the war ended, the term had become antiquated. It was one of those things he only ever came across in textbooks or overheard his parents murmuring to each other about late at night. Dream wasn't *stupid*; he knew as well as anyone that if it weren't for mixed marriages wizards would have died out already. That was why no one used the phrase seriously anymore, or so he'd thought.

The genuine way a member of Minx's own family had just thrown out the term was putting everything Dream had thought he'd known into question.

His attention was once again brought back to the present situation when Minx groaned and flipped the mystery person off.

"Oi, wouldja shut the fuck up?" she snapped. "I'm fuckin *busy*."

"Oh, don't be a wagon, Justine. Tell me who de feck you're blatherin' ter an' i'll leave yer alone." There was a pause, then, and Dream wondered if the mystery person intended on coming outside.

He shot Minx a questioning glance and opened his mouth to speak. "Who's th—"

The voice cut him off. "Oh my god, wait, is that yer fuckin mudblood boyfriend?!"

"Shut *UP*!" Minx screamed, enraged.

"Oh my *god*, it totally is, innit?!" There was a loud crashing sound just then as the front door to the manor swung open. Dream watched as a tall girl with winged eyeliner stepped outside.

The two girls were clearly sisters. The older one — at least five years older, if Dream had to guess — had bright pink hair and the same startling blue eyes as Minx. She eyed Dream up and down with something akin to excitement, which made the Slytherin boy immediately feel uncomfortable. After a moment of gawking, however, her face fell.

"I was 'opin to see the boytoy with me own eyes," she said sourly. "This isn't it."

Minx was seething. "No, it isn't *him*," she snapped. "Now can I fuckin finish here?!"

"Don't be *rude*," the girl scoffed, shooting Dream an unimpressed look before turning back to her younger sister. "So ye've already moved on from mudbloods? This lad looks like a *proper* wizard, at least."

Dream's eyes widened at both the repeated use of a racial slur *and* the implication that he and Minx were anything resembling a couple.

"We're definitely *not* a thing," he spluttered. "I wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole."

"Ditto, you cunt!" Minx shot back.

The older girl's eyebrows perked up at the sound of Dream's voice.

"Oi, was that a fuckin American accent?" she gasped. "Did ye fuckin bag *Selwyn's* kid, Justine?! Talk about an *upgrade*!"

Minx stomped her foot and pointed a threatening finger at her sister's face. " *Jennifer*, I swear to the Sacred Twenty-Eight, if ye don't go away right fuckin now—"

"Then *what*?" she challenged, folding her arms across her chest. "Ye two ave been standin 'ere yellin at each other like a pair of fuckin idiots for way too long. How about ye stop bein' a twat and let yer new boyfriend in so we can meet 'im, yeah? Mum'll be bloody thrilled."

And that was how Dream wound up having tea with Minx's family in their manor in Portmarnock on a summer afternoon.

"My, my, what a pleasant surprise!" the woman who Dream had been introduced to as Minx's mother exclaimed upon seeing Dream walk into her living room. "I didn't know you were friends with Selwyn's son, Justine!"

Minx scowled. "I'm *not*."

"Yeah, Mum, they're *more* than friends," Jennifer supplied deviously as she shut the door behind them. Mrs. Minx clapped her hands delightedly and gestured for everyone to take a seat on the extravagant green sofas around the unlit fireplace.

"I'll have the elves prepare us some tea," she announced. "Any preferences, Clay, dear?"

Dream awkwardly cleared his throat and shook his head. "Uh, actually, I really shouldn't be—"

"Oh, nonsense," Mrs. Minx cut him off dismissively. "I'm sure yer father won't mind if you stay for a little while. Miffy!"

A House-elf clad in a torn pillowcase apparated into the room and bowed its head respectfully.

"Y-yes, Madame Minx?" it stuttered.

"Fetch us a pot o' that new blend William brought back from South America. Remember to bring the sugar dish!"

The House-elf disappeared with a soft *pop*, leaving Dream alone in the room with the three Minx women. He shifted in his seat uncomfortably and busied himself with mentally cataloguing the living room interior.

"Admirin' the decor?" Mrs. Minx asked, following his gaze. "This house was built more than four hundred years ago, ye know. Over there on the far wall is a portrait of me great-great-grandfather."

"Oh, uh...nice," Dream commented awkwardly. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Minx bury her face in her hands.

“We ‘ave a tapestry above the fireplace,” Minx’s mother continued cheerfully, “but, of course, ye know all about tapestries.”

Dream nodded. Family tapestries were an ancient pureblood tradition; the Selwyns brought theirs with them wherever they moved. His family’s tapestry was hanging in their own living room back in England.

Miffy and another elf soon returned with a steaming pot of tea and a tray of scones. Dream picked at his fingers while he waited for his teacup to be placed on the coffee table in front of him, only glancing up when one of the elves asked him if he’d like any sugar or milk with his drink.

“Ye take sugar?” Mrs. Minx remarked with a smile. “Just like yer father. He’s always had a sweet tooth ever since he was a wee lad.” The Irish woman’s smile was so fond it made Dream want to gag. He wrinkled his nose and pushed the sugar tray away.

“On second thought, I’ll just take the milk,” he informed Miffy.

The room descended into stiff silence as everyone sipped their drinks. Dream noted how the Minx women gripped their teacups with elegantly curled fingers and raised pinkies, looking like the picture of pureblood perfection. He was reminded of the extravagant parties his mother used to throw at their house in Florida when he was a kid.

After what felt like an eternity of silent sipping, Mrs. Minx cleared her throat and looked interestedly at Dream.

“Clay,” she began curiously, “if ye don’t mind me asking, what brings ye to Ireland? Justine rarely ‘as friends over.”

*I’m investigating your involvement in a fucked up pureblood cult*, he thought to himself.

Out loud, he said, “I hadn’t heard from, uh, *Justine* in a while, so I came to check on her.”

Minx glared at him. Her mother, on the other hand, looked delighted.

“How lovely!” she exclaimed happily, turning to her older daughter. “Jenny, isn’t that just lovely?”

Jennifer nodded and smirked at her sister. “Aye, Mum, it’s incredible.”

Minx rolled her eyes. “Selwyn actually has to leave,” she grumbled. “So ye should probably say yer goodbyes and—”

“Oh, shush, Justine, let the boy stay, will ye?” her mom interrupted exasperatedly. “At least let ‘im finish his tea.”

Dream self-consciously brought the teacup to his lips and took another few sips, silently regretting his refusal of the sugar but feeling too stubborn to ask for any. He set the beverage back down and eyed Jennifer’s pink hair curiously, a question suddenly occurring to him.

“Hey, Jennifer,” he began, “how old are you?”

Minx’s older sister looked surprised by the question, but smiled nonetheless. “Nineteen,” she answered, then added, “much too old for ye, I’m afraid.”

Dream spluttered, his cheeks warming in embarrassment at the implication. “N-no, I wasn’t—”

“Jenny, mind yer manners,” Mrs. Minx scolded lightly, her lips curling into a hint of a smile.

Jennifer chuckled and took a sip from her own teacup before apologizing. “Sorry, Clay. Why’d ye ask?”

“Well,” Dream said, “I was wondering why I haven’t seen you before. You know, at Hogwarts. You only graduated, what, last year?”

The teasing smile instantly slipped from the older girl’s face at the question. When Dream looked over at Mrs. Minx, he saw that the woman’s demeanor had suddenly become considerably more on-edge.

Puzzled by the strange response, Dream bit his lip and began to backtrack. “Uh, sorry, did I say something—?”

“She went to Durmstrang,” Minx piped up from her place on the sofa.

Jennifer and her mother suddenly snapped out of whatever tense trance they had been in and settled back into their seats, leaving Dream confused about what had just occurred.

“Yes, William and I decided on the Durmstrang Institute for our eldest,” Mrs. Minx supplied, glancing at Jenny oddly. “Education is more structured in Bulgaria.”

“Oh,” Dream said. “But why—?”

A firm hand on his shoulder stopped him from asking the rest of his question. When Dream turned his head, he came face to face with a very annoyed looking Minx.

“Are ye done with yer tea, *Clay*?” she asked through gritted teeth. When Dream nodded, his Housemate stood up and yanked him to his feet.

“Thanks for the tea, Mum!” she said to her mother with a forced smile while pushing Dream out into the hallway. “It was fuckin’ wonderful. Bye, now!”

“Justine! Mind yer—”

“Language, yes, sorry! I meant it was *feckin’* wonderful!”

Dream soon found himself pulled around a corner and led down a dark, portrait-lined hallway. Some of the people in the paintings tried to make conversation with them as they passed, but Minx shut each of them up with a well-aimed middle finger. When she and Dream were far enough away from the living room to be out of earshot, the Slytherin girl pushed him roughly against the wall and held her wand up to his throat.

“What the *hell*, Minx—”

“*Fuck you*, Selwyn!” Minx hissed, pressing her wand tip painfully into Dream’s neck. “Ye barge into *my* fuckin house and have tea with *my* fuckin mother and then start fucking *interrogating*—”

“Oh, please,” Dream spat, shoving the girl away. “You know I couldn’t just say no! It’s not like I *wanted* to meet your stupid—”

“Careful with what you say next, Selwyn, because I will not hesitate to hex you where you stand.”

Dream rolled his eyes but didn’t finish his sentence. He waited for Minx to lower her wand before speaking again.

“I’ll happily get the hell away from here if you just answer a few questions,” he said evenly.

“Ye’ve got a lot o’ nerve.”

When Minx didn’t protest further, Dream took a deep breath and stared directly into her icy blue eyes.

“Were you the one who attacked Techno and Karl when we were eleven?”

Several beats of tense silence.

Finally, Minx blinked twice and shook her head. “*What?*”

“I *said* —” Dream started to repeat himself, but stopped when Minx abruptly turned away from him and punched the opposite wall with her fist.

“Fuckin’ hell, Selwyn,” she muttered under her breath. Dream noticed that she was trembling, but he couldn’t tell if it was from nerves or barely suppressed rage.

He stood a little taller. “Well? Were you?”

After a few more moments, Minx turned around to face him, her gaze accusatory.

“Who the fuck told you.”

Dream’s cool expression twisted into something dark and furious at her words, at the *admission* that she’d put his friends on a goddamn hit list. That she’d put *George* on a goddamn hit list. That she’d tried to *hurt George*—

“You *bitch*,” Dream spat venomously, his voice dripping with hatred. “I knew it. I fucking *knew* it. You racist, evil, wicked—”

“It was Schlatt, wasn’t it?” Minx interrupted unflinchingly, her voice just as furious as Dream’s own. “He never woulda sold me out, Selwyn. How could you take advantage of his curse like that? How could you fucking *hurt* him like that?”

“I didn’t do shit to Schlatt,” Dream retorted. “I didn’t need to. I figured you out all on my own.”

“Ha!” Minx laughed humorlessly. “You eejit! Ye didn’t figure out *shite*. Ye probably just saw my name on something in yer daddy’s office and jumped to a billion fuckin’ conclusions.”

“The *right* conclusions.”

“Oh, really, Selwyn?”

“You just *admitted*—”

“Would ye just stop an’ *think* for a minute?” Minx exclaimed, stomping her foot for emphasis.

“Techno and that Hufflepuff kid were hit with a Draught of Living Death and stunned. Do I look like some fuckin’ child prodigy who’s been dueling and brewing potions since I was eleven?”

Dream shook his head. “There are a million ways you could have accessed the potion, so don’t pull that crap.”

Minx groaned and rubbed her temples in frustration. “God, how is anyone friends with you? Yer stupid, annoyin, and a damn hypocrite.”

“A hypocrite? I would *never* use the M-word *or* attack my friends, unlike *some other* people.”

“Selwyn. Clay. Dream. Whatever the fuck you go by nowadays,” Minx seethed. “Go home and snoop through yer daddy’s office again and find the fuckin’ plannin’ documents. When ye do, ye’ll see that I was under the fuckin’ *Imperius* curse.”

Dream scoffed. “Yeah, like I believe that.”

Minx rolled her eyes. “I don’t have any respect for ye, Selwyn, an’ I’m not gonna waste my time tryin to justify myself to a fuckin hypocrite. Get out of this house.”

“Gladly, bitch.”

Dream didn’t have any time to react before Minx aimed a swift kick between his legs. In an instant, blinding white pain shot through his system and brought him to his knees. He cried out feebly as a wave of nausea hit him full-force and it was all he could do to not curl up in a ball and cry.

“Watch yer mouth,” Minx snapped. “I did some bad shit in Year One, but I had *no choice*. I’m tryin to be better now. You, on the other hand...” Minx paused to bend down closer to Dream’s ear.

“You don’t have an excuse, Dream. Ye have a choice and yer choosin’ *wrong*.”

Satisfied that she’d gotten the last word, Minx turned away from him and began walking back down the hallway. Before she could disappear from view, however, Dream called out for her to stop.

“Wait,” he said. “You’re just gonna leave me here in the hall?”

Minx raised a single eyebrow, unimpressed. “You can see yerself out.”

Dream grimaced, pain still radiating from his groin. “...I *really* d-don’t want to take the bus in m-my condition, so...uh, can I use y-your Floo?”

Minx groaned. “Fuckin’ hell.”

~~~~~

Dream returned to Caerphilly a week after speaking with Minx.

He hadn’t wanted to go to the lab, of course, but his father insisted that the W.A.P. could use extra help with specimen tagging. His dad’s colleagues were apparently very busy with a new shipment of creatures brought back from an expedition to the Caucasus Mountains.

“You really must see these creatures, boys,” Mr. Selwyn told him and Schlatt as they grabbed handfuls of Floo powder. “They’re called *Pantasma* by the locals, but we’ve dubbed them Phantoms. Right fascinating things, they are.”

“That sounds awesome, Sir,” Schlatt replied enthusiastically as Dream’s dad stepped into the green flames of their fireplace.

Dream let Schlatt go ahead of him. Once his roommate was through the flames, Dream hesitated before tossing in his own handful of Floo powder.

He really didn’t want to go back to the laboratory.

He stood before the green flames for a moment and contemplated just staying back. He'd get in trouble for it, he knew, but it wasn't like his dad could force him through the Floo.

He could Imperius you. Y'know, like Minx's parents did...

No. Minx *had* to have been lying. That curse was illegal, and there was no way one of her parents would risk time in Azkaban for casting it on their own daughter. The mere thought of it was ridiculous, Dream knew, and yet...

There was a tiny part of him that couldn't let the thought go.

"W.A.P. Headquarters," he said, stepping into the fire with a heavy heart.

The laboratory in Caerphilly looked the same as he remembered it. Dozens of Ministry officials in white robes rushed from room to room carrying various pieces of equipment in their hands. Dream did a double take when he saw one of his father's colleagues carrying a cage containing what appeared to be a tiny humanoid pig. He wanted to follow the person into the next specimen room but was stopped when he heard his name being called from somewhere to his left.

"Dream!" Schlatt called out, waving the blond over. "We're in here, buddy."

Resolving to get a look at the other new creatures later, Dream followed his roommate into one of the specimen tagging chambers. Upon stepping through the doorway he was struck with the sight of about twenty-odd stingrays flopping around inside a large glass enclosure.

"Woah," he said, pressing a hand up against the glass. "Did Dad bring these back from Florida?"

Schlatt shot him a questioning look. "What?"

"These stingrays," Dream explained. "There were a ton of them in Florida."

"These aren't stingrays, Clay," a voice said from around the corner. A few seconds later, Mr. Selwyn stepped into view, a pair of dragon hide gloves on his hands.

Dream eyed the creatures again curiously. "They look like stingrays."

"*These*," his dad emphasized, reaching a hand into the glass box and firmly grasping one of the squirming creatures by its tail, "are adolescent Phantoms, freshly-retrieved from Azerbaijan."

Dream and Schlatt both watched the alchemist as he expertly flipped the Phantom over to expose its pale white abdomen. It hissed and flapped its dark blue appendages in protest.

"Observe, boys."

With clinical precision, Dream's father retrieved a scalpel from his equipment box and swiftly sliced off the very tips of each blue wing. The Phantom let out a screech of what could only be pain as a pale white goo oozed from the wounds. For a brief moment, its neon green eyes stared directly into Dream's own, making the boy's heart skip a beat in his chest.

Then the creature's eyes closed and it went limp in his father's arms.

Dream's jaw dropped in shock. "Is it *dead*?" he demanded. His dad waved him off dismissively.

"No, no, don't be foolish. It is merely unconscious."

"Why did you cut it up like that?!"

Schlatt stepped forward and peered more closely at the amputated wing segments. “Are you sending these to the magibiologists?” he asked.

“Exactly,” Selwyn confirmed with a nod, turning to Dream. “Phantom membranes are rumored to possess levitational properties. By clipping the creature’s wings we are able to both control its movement and collect samples for further research.

“But...” Dream trailed off, eyes still wide with surprise. “D-doesn’t it hurt them?”

Selwyn shrugged. “Perhaps. But the pain is momentary. It will be unable to fly effectively for a few weeks, but Phantom membranes grow back.”

Schlatt hummed in acknowledgement and drummed his fingers against the flat surface of the operating table. “Are we gonna tag all of ‘em today?”

“Enthusiastic, I see,” Mr. Selwyn remarked with a smirk. “We can certainly try, Jebediah. Spare gloves should be in the cupboard behind you.”

Schlatt quickly shuffled over to the cupboard and retrieved two extra pairs of gloves, setting them on the table next to the glass enclosure. Dream felt sick to his stomach.

“Now,” Selwyn instructed, gesturing to a set of surgical tools in front of them. “I find it best to use traditional scalpels for incisions such as these, but—”

“I’m gonna throw up,” Dream gasped suddenly. His hands began to tremble.

His father barely glanced at him before rolling his eyes. “Come now, Clay, no need for dramatics. Put your gloves on.”

“N-no,” Dream stuttered. “I-I can’t.”

“C’mon, Dream,” Schlatt mumbled, nudging the pair of gloves closer to the blond. “Just put ‘em on.”

Dream shook his head and took several steps back towards the door.

“Clay,” his father said in a warning tone.

Dream blinked several times when his eyes began to water. “I *can’t*.”

“You can and you will. This is no way for an almost fourteen-year-old young man to behave.”

Dream looked once more at his dad, then at Schlatt, then at the glass container full of wiggling Phantoms. Then he ran.

“Wait, Dream—”

“Let him, Jebediah,” he heard his dad say as he bolted for the door. “I’ll sort him out later.”

Dream speed-walked through the halls of the W.A.P., white-robed figures passing by him in a blur of motion and sound. He couldn’t focus on anything except for the crystal-clear image of the Phantom’s pained green gaze burned into his brain.

He didn’t mean to stop in front of Observation Room 1, but that was where his legs carried him.

He glanced around briefly to make sure no one was watching. When the coast felt clear enough, he

pushed the door open and ducked inside.

It was just as dark as it had been last time. The windowless room was empty and cold and just as eerie as Dream remembered it. He hesitated by the door before finally mustering up the courage to take several steps forward.

He cleared his throat.

“Randolph?”

He waited for some noise or movement to alert him of the other boy’s presence, but there was no response. Guilt swirled in the pit of his stomach as he remembered the documents he’d photographed several months prior.

No signs of controllable magic. Termination recommended.

He walked up to the glass pane and pressed his nose against the transparent barrier, eyes searching the darkness for the faint glow of purple particles.

Nothing.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that a piece of paper had been fixed to the wall several feet away. His eyes could barely make out the words inked on its surface, but after a few moments of squinting he deduced that it was a log of some sorts.

02/5: Enderman Study № 3 Subject #00029 transferred to C.R.2. for termination.

08/5: Enderman Study № 3 Subject #00034 arrival.

30/5 Enderman Study № 3 Subject #00034 transferred to C.R.2. for termination.

Several more entries were listed, but Dream tore his eyes away after reading the first three lines. He slid to the ground slowly, his knees suddenly unable to support his weight.

Terminated. Eleven years old. Your fault your fault your fault—

Tears streamed down his face and dampened the front of his robes. His frame began to shake with silent sobs.

Fucking hypocrite.

It was several hours before his dad found him alone in that same observation room and angrily pulled him to his feet. Dream said nothing on the way home. He didn’t even protest when his dad forbade him from seeing George until September.

When he fell asleep that night, Randolph Boo haunted his dreams.

~~~~~

*Dream,*

*What’s happened to you? I haven’t seen you in a week. I hope Ruby is able to get through your*

*window without being intercepted — I know this has something to do with your dad and I would hate for him to keep this letter from you. Please let me know you're alright. I'm worried.*

*Sincerely,*

*George*

~~~~~

hey gogi,

im good my dad just grounded me becuz hes stupid. wont be able to see u 4 a while. sorry

tell ur mom i miss her lemonade

-d

~~~~~

*Dream,*

*Your insistence on writing like an illiterate seven-year-old continues to baffle me. Is it an American thing (like how you spell "colour" wrong) or is it just a Dream thing?*

*I'm sorry to hear that I won't be seeing much of you. Why are you being punished, though?*

*Mum says thanks. I filled a plastic water bottle with some of her lemonade and am tying it to Ruby's foot. She doesn't seem too pleased about that, but it's only a short flight so she should be able to make it.*

*Best,*

*George*

~~~~~

gogi,

thanx 4 da lemonade, u r da best and i luv u. my bday iz in a few weeks and i want a lifetime supply of dis stuff. also ruby iz a bich cuz she bit me when i tried 2 untie da bottle



-d

~~~~~

*Dream,*

*Stop riting lyke an ideeut pleez its very anoyin and it hertz mi eyez*

*That took way more time to write than actual English, which convinces me you write like that for the sole purpose of annoying me. If that isn't the most Slytherin thing in the world I don't know what is, you stubborn git.*

*Mrs. Huckson has invited me to accompany her family on holiday to Spain as her nanny. All I have to do is watch over five small children and I get a free holiday! And I'll get paid! My mum is really pleased even if it makes her jealous.*

*Unfortunately, I won't be able to write for a while because I'll be surrounded by Muggles. Can't exactly summon an owl from a Spanish villa. I'm attaching the recipe for Mum's lemonade to this letter so you can force your slave House-elf to make it for you.*

*See you in September! Miss you loads.*

*Love,*

*George*

~~~~~

The start of a new school year had always been exciting for George.

The first day of September always marked the start of something wonderful. The arrival of autumn brought with it the promise of magic and opportunity and a long-awaited reunion with his Hogwarts friends.

George was *especially* excited for his fourth year, however. An entire summer spent working odd jobs had left him counting down the days until he could finally board the Hogwarts Express and leave the boring babysitting gigs behind.

It wasn't that he didn't appreciate his summer jobs; on the contrary, he was extremely grateful for his kind Muggle neighbors who'd hired him without a second thought after his dad lost his job. It was just that lawn mowing and babysitting were stressful activities. He was eager to return to the much preferred feelings of stress that came along with normal things like friends and schoolwork.

"Goodbye, Georgie!" George's mum called out as she waved goodbye to him from the driver's seat of the family car. George waved back, not dropping his hand until the vehicle sped off and out of his sight.

He told himself that he didn't mind having to lug his things onto Platform Nine and Three-Quarters all on his own. His mum was busy with two different jobs; the fact that she'd even had time to drop him off in the first place was a miracle. Still, he felt the tiniest pang in his chest as he wheeled a

trolley full of magical stuff through King's Cross. The odd looks from the Muggles around him were much harder to ignore without his parents by his side.

He didn't hesitate when it came time to run full speed into the brick wall between the ninth and tenth platforms. It surprised him how much easier that part of the journey had become. He'd defied the laws of physics so often that phasing through walls didn't startle him anymore, although he suspected there would always be a tiny Muggle part of him that worried he would grievously injure himself. He hadn't yet, however.

On the other side of the wall George was met with a thick crowd of parents hugging their children goodbye and students reuniting after months spent apart. Gripping the handles of his trolley, he weaved through the throngs of people in search of a part of the platform that wasn't cramped and suffocating.

Idly, he wondered if there was some sort of friend-finding charm cast on the platform. How else was he always able to find his friends so easily?

Just as that thought occurred to him, he heard the familiar whining voice of one of his roommates.

"*Please* don't make me go! I'm sick!" cried an overdramatic Wilbur Soot from somewhere behind him in the crowd. "I've got a fever so high you could brew a potion on my forehead!"

George swiveled his head back and forth but couldn't seem to spot the curly-haired boy. After what felt like an eternity of craning his neck, he leaned against his trolley and decided to wait until the voices came to *him*.

"Your temperature's fine," drawled an off-puttingly deep — yet oddly familiar? — voice in response.

"It said ninety-eight point five on your heat measurer! That's *high*!"

"For the last time, it was on Fahrenheit. And that's the *normal temperature for a human bein'*. I proved it to you, I took my *own* temperature and it was the same as yours!"

George furrowed his brows in thought, wondering who on earth Wilbur was talking to.

"See?" he heard his roommate retort, "I've given you my illness too! We're both sick now! We have to call your mum to pick us up now before we get everyone else sick as well!"

"If you want a temperature so bad, maybe I should just set you on *fire*. Will that make you happy?"

The two voices went silent for a moment before the one belonging to Wilbur groaned loudly.

"Ugh, this is going to be the worst year *ever*!"

"C'mon, Wil, quit bein' dramatic."

"I'm not being dramatic! Since when have *I* ever been dramatic?!"

"I've never known you to be reasonable a day in your life."

A tell-tale head of pink hair emerged from the crowd, causing George's eyebrows to shoot up in surprise. "Techno?!" he called out, waving the quidditch player over with one hand.

As Techno approached him with Wilbur in tow, George could barely believe his eyes. The boy he shared a room with the year before had grown what looked like a full head in height and gained a

voice as deep as a bullfrog's. If it weren't for the pink ponytail, George doubted he would have even recognized him.

Techno smiled and pointed at George teasingly. "Oh hey, George!" he greeted him before turning to Wilbur. "Look Wil, it's George! He hasn't heard all about how hard and sad your life is yet, you should tell 'im all about it."

Wilbur immediately threw his arms around George and rested his head on his shoulder with a sigh, something that probably looked quite silly given that Wilbur was a whole foot taller than him. George shot Techno a questioning glance before giving Wilbur a few hesitant pats on the back.

"Uh...there, there, Wilbur," George said awkwardly as Wilbur tightened the embrace. "What's the matter?"

"It's *horrible*," Wilbur replied, sniffing dramatically. "Everything is horrible."

"Why's that?"

Wilbur let go of George in order to look him dead in the eyes. "Because I've met the love of my life, George."

Behind Wilbur, Techno facepalmed. George adjusted his glasses and pursed his lips, unsure of whether or not Wilbur was doing a bit.

"Erm...alright? Isn't that...good?" George questioned when Wilbur didn't elaborate.

The curly-haired boy shook his head and placed one hand over his eyes theatrically. "No! It isn't *good*, Gogi! How could it be good when it's causing me so much agony?"

"You'll see her in three months." Techno said with a roll of his eyes.

"Exactly! Three entire months until we can be together again!" Wilbur cried, his tone one of anguish.

"Who's 'she?'" George asked.

"She is beauty. She is grace. She is the most magnificent creature to ever roam this wretched earth —"

"She's Tommy's babysitter," Techno cut in, clamping a hand over Wilbur's mouth and stopping his dramatic monologue. Wilbur wrenched the pink-haired boy's hand away and took an indignant step backwards.

"Please, Techno, do *not* interrupt my soliloquy with talk of that gremlin child."

George raised an eyebrow at Wilbur's impressive display of melodrama. "So...you fancy someone's babysitter?"

Wilbur huffed and crossed his arms over his chest. "No, George, I do not *fancy a babysitter*. I am *in love* with the most delightful woman in existence."

"She thinks your name is Willy," Techno said in a deadpan voice.

"It's an adoring nickname that she alone has bestowed upon me!"

"She's *three years* older than you—"

“Two years and ten months!”

“She’s a *Muggle* who you can’t tell about magic —”

“Love knows no boundaries!”

“She has the *ugliest* salmon tattoo on her shoulder—”

“*Silence!*” Wilbur shouted, clamping his own hands over his ears. “I will not stand here while you besmirch the good name of my beloved! I am *leaving*.”

George put a hand on Wilbur’s arm, stopping him before he could storm off. “It’s okay, Wilbur. I promise I won’t take the piss,” he assured his roommate. “I’m sure this girl is lovely.”

“Oh *god*,” Techno groaned, “I’m gettin’ on the train. Feel free to join me when you get tired of this lovesick fool.”

Techno soon disappeared from view, leaving George alone with Wilbur on the platform as they waited for their other friends to arrive.

“Oh, Gogi, she’s *incredible*,” Wilbur gushed, eyes staring off into the distance. “She makes me want to compose symphonies and write sonnets. She’s just stunning...if she weren’t a Muggle, I might have thought her part Veela.”

“What’s her name?”

Wilbur beamed at the question. “Oh, her name is the most enchanting two-syllable word I’ve ever heard, George. Her name is — wait for it — *Sally*.”

It took all of George’s willpower not to laugh right then and there. Wilbur, apparently oblivious to George’s amusement, kept rambling.

“She’s simply *enthral*ling! Whenever I consider my life before her, it all seems so dull in comparison. It’s like I was seeing the world in grayscale before she came along and brought color into my life! Can you imagine someone like that, Gogi? Someone who can make your world brighter than you could’ve ever imagined?”

George’s hands automatically reached up to adjust the color correction goggles on his face, a Christmas gift from Dream. His heart began to beat a bit faster for no apparent reason as he shook his head at Wilbur.

“No, sorry,” he muttered.

“Pity,” Wilbur remarked, holding a hand over his heart. “I hope the whole world experiences a love like mine.”

“What’s this about love?”

George turned around instinctively at the sound of the new voice, eyes immediately locking with Dream’s warm green ones.

“Dream!” George exclaimed happily, running up to give his best friend a hug without a second thought. Dream stumbled back a few steps but returned the embrace eagerly.

“Hey, Gog,” he chuckled. “Long time no see.”

“Well *I’ll* say,” Wilbur commented as he eyed the Slytherin boy up and down. “Have you been drinking growth potions? You’re almost as tall as I am, now.”

Dream scoffed at that. “*Almost?*”

A loud whistle announced the train’s imminent departure, interrupting the boys before they could get into a full-blown height squabble. They exchanged lighthearted jokes as they followed the crowd of other eager students onto the Hogwarts Express and made the familiar beeline towards their usual compartment.

When they opened the doors, they found Techno, Eret, and Sapnap already happily chatting away inside. Techno winked at George as he shuffled into his favorite window seat.

“Hear enough about Sally?” he asked with a smirk. George couldn’t help but smile when Wilbur huffed indignantly at their roommate’s question.

“Who’s Sally?” Sapnap questioned, looking back and forth between George, Techno, and Wilbur in confusion. Techno groaned and slapped a hand over his face.

“Why d’you always hafta ask the stupidest questions, Nappitus?”

“*You* brought it up!”

The train let out another whistle before finally embarking on the long trip through the British hillsides. Eret tilted his head at Dream, a question clearly on his mind.

“Where are Schlatt and Minx?” he asked the Slytherin innocently. Dream and George both tensed at the mention of the Irish girl. Sensing the tension, Sapnap chose that moment to let loose a shockingly loud belch as a distraction.

“What’s *wrong* with you?” Eret demanded, leaning away from the Gryffindor with a look of disgust on his face.

“Better out than in,” Sapnap shrugged.

Dream snorted at their friend’s childish show of comradery as George silently thanked Sapnap’s idiotic quick thinking in his head. The guy had some admittedly horrible ideas, but at least they were effective.

The group slowly devolved into idle chatter after that, not really speaking about anything in particular. Wilbur, for once, seemed to have no anecdotes to share, instead choosing to stare out the window and loudly hum an unfamiliar tune.

At the sound of the melody, Techno sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose in irritation. Wilbur peeked over his shoulder to look at the rest of the group, but quickly turned back to the window as he realized that George was staring.

“Uh... what are you singing?” George inquired, causing the curly haired boy to pause dramatically, as though startled by a question he was clearly eager to answer.

“Oh! I didn’t even realize how loud I was being, that was so rude of me!” He exclaimed without a hint of apology in his tone, “But, well, since you *asked*, it’s actually an *original* song.”

“I can’t believe you took the bait,” Techno muttered under his breath in disappointment as everyone else in the compartment gasped and leaned forward in their seats.

"It sounds lovely already," Eret complimented. "Do you have lyrics for it?"

Wilbur puffed out his chest in pride, "Well, I don't mean to *brag* but yes, lyrics *and* a formally composed tune!"

Dream whistled appreciatively as Wilbur basked in the praise, waving his hands up and down as though to stifle their awe.

"Yes, yes, you know, I'd *love* to play it for you guys but— oh wait! Silly me, how could I forget?"

Techno scoffed and rolled his eyes, but no one really noticed. They were all too busy watching as Wilbur bent over and moved a few things around underneath his seat. After a few moments, he picked up a leather satchel and placed it in his lap.

"What's in there?" wondered Sapnap.

"Please, gentlemen, let's be patient," Wilbur grinned. He unclasped the satchel and, to George's astonishment, proceeded to defy the laws of physics by shoving his entire arm inside of it.

"An extension charm?" George asked. Wilbur nodded.

"Yes, it's in here *somewhere*... oh! Got it!"

Everyone other than Techno gasped in surprise when Wilbur pulled a full-sized guitar out of the small leather bag.

"You got a guitar!" Eret exclaimed. "Did you spend all summer studying song charms for it?"

Wilbur smiled and shook his head. "No, my dear Eret, this isn't an ordinary guitar. This is a *Muggle* guitar."

Dream's eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "How does it work?"

"You have to play each note with your own fingers!"

Dream and Eret both gaped at the revelation while George, Sapnap, and Techno exchanged glances.

"You mean you don't use any nonverbal spells to play it?" Eret continued his line of questioning.

"Nope!"

"Not even an amplifying charm?"

"Nope!"

"Not even—"

"Eretson, would you just let him play it already? He's been dyin to show it off to someone that isn't me or his parents the whole summer." Techno cut him off.

Eret muttered something under his breath but complied and leaned back in his seat, eyes trained on the instrument in his roommate's hands.

"This song came to me the night after I met the love of my life," Wilbur informed everyone seriously. "It's not finished yet, but I think I'll call it 'In Love with a Muggle Girl.'"

Wilbur cleared his throat and gave his guitar an experimental strum. The sounds bounced beautifully off the walls of the compartment, and even Techno seemed to forget that he was supposed to appear annoyed by it. They all listened eagerly as Wilbur began to deftly strum a delightful rift with his fingers. After several beats, he began to sing.

“Wake up in my lonely bed

My darling lives rent-free in my head

Think about her as I wake

My heart is hers to shield or break...”

George soon found himself lulled into a trance, unable to look away from the boy with the guitar.

“She’s beauty, she’s grace

She has the voice of an angel and a very fine girl’s face

Just a single word exchanged

My life on earth’s been rearranged...”

Techno rolled his eyes at the sappy lyrics, but George could tell he was enjoying the performance. It was impossible *not* to enjoy it — Wilbur’s voice was mesmerizing.

“I wanna be the guy who you give all of your pens to,

Meanwhile I’ll use my magic to impress you.

‘Cause I like you,

And my twelve-inch wand’s impressive

Let’s skip to the good bit

And make this song a little more suggestive...”

“Wait, what?” Sappnap laughed only to be immediately shushed by everyone else. Wilbur, unbothered, continued to sing.

“I’m in love with a

I’m in love with a

I’m in love with a

With a Muggle girl.

I’m in love with a

I’m in love with a

I’m in love with a

With a Muggle girl.”

Wilbur's fingers ceased their rhythmic strumming. The final notes of the song eventually faded into the background, leaving only the chugging of the train to fill the silence.

Sapnap spoke up again. "Dude. That is one lucky Muggle girl."

Wil smiled bashfully and flicked a stray curl away from his face. "Thanks, Sappitus."

"How did you learn to play like that? To *sing* like that?" Eret marvelled, face alight with astonishment.

Wilbur shrugged. "It's easy when one has a muse—"

"Stop, stop right there" Techno hurriedly piped up, shooting Wil a stern glare. "If you go on one more spiel about this girl I'm gonna blow up you, your guitar, the train, and myself. Please. This pinin' has been my whole summer."

They all shared in a laugh as Techno insisted that he wasn't joking and Wilbur put his guitar away. Soon, the small talk had resumed and they all relaxed into their seats, just enjoying each others' company.

Dream nudged George in the side. "Tired?" he asked, green eyes crinkling at the corners.

"No," George lied, resisting the urge to yawn. "What gave you that impression?"

"You've got bags under your eyes."

George rubbed at his eyes with the sleeve of his robe as if the gesture would wipe his exhaustion away. "Alright, yes," he admitted sheepishly. "I had to wake up early to run a final errand before leaving with Mum."

"Sheesh."

"Yeah."

A beat. Dream pursed his lips, seemingly thinking something over.

"If you need to take a nap or something," he began, glancing off to the side momentarily before looking at George once more, "I'm pretty comfy, I think."

George snorted. "What?"

"Oh, come on, George," he groaned, elbowing the Ravenclaw gently in the ribs. "I'm offering you my services."

George was about to ask Dream what he meant when it suddenly hit him what his best friend was suggesting. His instinct was to huff and immediately decline the offer; his face heated up at the thought of using Dream as a pillow. But then again...

He *was* pretty tired. And Dream's shoulder did look inviting.

Before he could think better of it, George scooted closer to Dream and tentatively rested his head on the other boy's shoulder. Dream immediately shuffled a bit, rearranging them into a slightly more comfortable position where they could both support each other's weights and relax.

"Thanks," George muttered. He felt Dream's shoulder shake slightly in what might have been a laugh.

"Any time."

And, before George knew it, the steady chugging of the train soon lulled them both to sleep.

~~~~~

"I'm absolutely *starved*!" Sappnap announced as the group trudged up to the castle's front doors on their way to the Great Hall.

Techno couldn't agree more. His mouth was already watering at the mere thought of the delectable dishes that would undoubtedly be served at the opening banquet that night. Of course, they'd first have to get through the stupid song and the sorting ceremony and the boring speeches, but the reward would be all worth it.

His stomach rumbled as he plopped himself down at the Ravenclaw table along with the rest of his Housemates. He took a deep breath, preparing himself to power through the mind-numbing niceties ahead.

Minutes ticked by agonizingly slowly. Only when all of the teachers were in place and the hat was on its stool did McGonagall finally take the stage. It only took her clearing her throat once for the students to immediately quiet down.

Her speech was just as boring as usual. Techno tuned most of it out, his thoughts drifting idly to Philza. If Philza were in charge, everyone would be eating already.

He felt a sudden pang in his chest at the thought of the former Head Boy. It felt wrong to be sitting at the table without Philza being a few seats away and ready to yell at them playfully for having 'too many fuckin friends that eat all our shit'. Techno didn't even want to know who the new Head Boy was. He probably sucked. Nobody was like Phil.

"-having said that, please give a warm welcome to our new first-years!"

The cheers of the student body snapped Techno out of his thoughts and he gave a half baked clap of his own. Everyone directed their attention to the door through which the first-years would be coming in, waiting to see who their new peers would be.

A second passed. Then two. By the time a full minute had gone by, the cheers had died down and everyone had begun to shift awkwardly in their seats. Someone over at the Hufflepuff table coughed. Wilbur leaned over to fix a crooked utensil near his plate.

McGonagall cleared her throat and glared at the door, but it remained shut.

Murmurs broke out among the student body. Wilbur leaned over and whispered, "What do you think happened?"

Techno shrugged. "Dunno, but if those kids don't show up soon I'm gonna eat my napkin."

After a while the entire hall devolved into loud chattering and McGonagall looked like she was about to hex someone. Before she could cast anything, however, the door finally burst open, stunning the hall into immediate silence.

"We're here, we're here! Don' start anythin' without us!" Professor Hagrid cried, stumbling into the Great Hall completely soaked from head to toe. A bunch of drenched eleven-year-olds shuffled in right behind him, their shoes squeaking loudly against the floor.

"Professor Hagrid! What on *earth* have you done to these poor children?!" The headmistress exclaimed, her eyes widening as more first-years filed in. Each one seemed to leave a trail of water in their wakes.

"It wasn' me fault, Headmistress McGonagall! I swear!"

"Then whose fault *was* it?!" she demanded.

"I— y'see—" he stammered, and Techno couldn't help but feel bad for the poor guy. "It wasn' anyone's fault, really, t'was jus' a lil' mistake—"

"Ho my god— holy shit, Tubbo, that was fuckin INSANE!" a shrill voice pierced everyone's ears, echoing off the walls of the Great Hall and effectively cutting off both Hagrid's lame excuses and Techno's ability to breathe.

Now, Technoblade didn't consider himself to be a particularly unlucky person.

In fact, he thought that as far as the average person went, he was probably on the luckier side. He had made a few significant plays against GB80 the year before with the help of luck, as much as he'd like to say that all of his successes on the quidditch pitch were thanks to pure skill. The fact that he'd been able to save Wilbur from being hit by a truck as he walked into traffic while daydreaming about Sally seemed pretty lucky too.

No, Technoblade definitely wasn't an unlucky person. When he heard that familiar earsplitting voice however, he came to the conclusion that his luck must have completely run out.

If it weren't for Wilbur's fingers squeezing his arm so hard that his circulation was being cut off, Techno would've thought he was having a nightmare.

But no, not even his own mind was twisted enough to imagine something like this. Only reality could be as cold and cruel as the truth he was being faced with at that moment.

"See, I *knew* that standing up on those tiny fuckin boats would be a good idea, now we've made our marks as the *cool kids*. All the wizard people will know my name, Tubbo. They'll be— they'll be all like 'Wow, you're so cool, Tommy!' and I'll go— I'll say 'yes, I know, now please direct me towards the nearest woman,' and then... hoh, then I will get money."

The boy stepped into the Great Hall, his blonde hair matted against his head and arms gesturing wildly as he spoke to a shorter boy beside him. His grin made Wilbur bash his head against Techno's shoulder in an attempt to knock himself out.

"Y'know, I'm an atheist, but I really can't think of an explanation for this that doesn't just boil down to 'Satan himself has it out for us.'" Techno muttered and Wilbur nodded, making some sort of garbled choking sound that summed up the situation pretty well, in Techno's opinion.

Tommy kept on rambling to his friend, who nodded enthusiastically. Techno's eyes narrowed.

He recognized the other kid, too.

"Him *as well*?!" Wilbur hissed, because of course those two brats were a package deal. Wherever Tommy went, the other kid followed. He distinctly remembered Sally complaining that she should

be paid double for the two of them.

"Oh, it will be so epic. Do wizards have wizard museums? I'm gonna be in one. I will be one of those fuckin interactive displays that make sounds n shit—"

"*Excuse* me!" McGonagall screeched, finally recovering from the initial shock of having an eleven-year-old interrupt her and use profanities as liberally as commas in his sentences.

Tommy paused his chatter to blink up at the headmistress owlishly, only just seeming to notice that the whole castle was staring at him. "Who, me?" he asked innocently, causing Hagrid to groan.

"This is *unacceptable* behavior!" McGonagall yelled. "Ten poin— *no*, *TWENTY* points from—" she cut herself off upon realizing the child before her hadn't been sorted yet. "—a House we will determine very soon!"

Techno heard Sappitus Nappitus laugh loudly from the Gryffindor table. "This kid is *gold*!"

"Are you two okay?" Eret asked, shooting Techno and Wilbur a concerned look from across the table.

"I'm about to go into cardiac arrest," Wilbur choked out.

"And I'm about ta join you." Techno added.

"Wait, didn't that boy call himself Tommy?" George asked. "As in, *that* Tommy?!"

"Oh my god," Eret gasped, "It *can't* be. Wouldn't you two have noticed his magical abilities?!"

"Please don't start victim-blamin' us now, we're in distress," Techno pleaded.

It took several moments for the student body to reign themselves in enough to allow McGonagall to begin the actual ceremony. After the Sorting Hat sang its stupid song she proceeded to read off the names a tad more forcefully than usual.

"Aagaard, Martin!"

A scrawny-looking kid rushed up to the stool and hurriedly pulled the hat over his eyes. Techno sighed in displeasure when he was declared a Ravenclaw and ushered to their table.

If it were up to Techno, Ravenclaw would stop accepting new recruits completely. He didn't need any more noisy children running around *his* common room.

He tried to distract himself by paying attention to the next few names being called, but the looming threat of Tommy and his friend breathing down his neck kept him from fully zoning out. Or maybe that was just Wilbur hyperventilating.

McGonagall cleared her throat and read out the next name on the list. "Bumble, Tobias!"

Tommy's tiny sidekick eagerly bounced up to the hat, looking like he was about to piss himself out of excitement. The hat seemed to take its time with the kid. Two dread-filled minutes passed in which all Techno could think was *please not Ravenclaw, please for the love of all that is good on this earth*.

"HUFFLEPUFF!"

Both Techno and Wilbur breathed a sigh of relief.

"Hey, that was Tommy's friend, right? That means you won't have to deal with one of them, at least," George offered sympathetically.

"Right.... One of them..." Wilbur muttered.

Techno tapped his foot impatiently as more and more names were called. He and Wilbur hadn't paid so much attention to a sorting ceremony since their own three years prior.

After what felt like hours but was probably something closer to ten minutes, the moment of truth came.

"Nutpig, Thomas!"

Wilbur's grip on Techno's arm tightened.

"He's not clever *or* creative enough for Ravenclaw, surely," Wil whispered to him frantically. "Tell me he's not, Techno. Lie to me if you must."

Techno tightened his hold on his friend's arm but didn't dare tear his eyes away from the blond menace currently walking up to the Sorting Hat. "Of course he's not, Wil," Techno lied, his voice wavering as Tommy took a seat on the stool. He didn't dare let Wilbur know that the boy was a straight A student who was *definitely* qualified for their house, for fear of actually having to take him to the infirmary.

The Great Hall waited with bated breath for McGonagall to drop the ratty old hat on his head, which she did with a look of disdain on her face.

*Please not Ravenclaw. Please not Ravenclaw. Please not—*

"GRYFFINDOR!"

"YES!" the two Ravenclaw fourth-years cheered in unison, their cries even louder than the noise coming from the Gryffindor table.

"Let's GO!" Screamed Techno, wrapping Wilbur up in the tightest hug he'd ever initiated.

"Oh my god, I think I'm about to cry," Wilbur sighed in relief, hugging him back.

"Erm, congrats?" George said as a prefect hurried to shut them up.

"Thank you, oh my god, he can *never know* that we're students here." Wilbur stated firmly.

Techno nodded, "You don't needa tell me twice, I'm already plannin' on ways we can find out his schedule to avoid him in the hallway."

"Um, not to ruin your good mood, but isn't he going to find out about you as soon as quidditch season starts?" George asked.

Techno paused, his stomach filling with dread. "I'm quittin' the game," he said decidedly.

"No!"

The ceremony came to a close soon after some kid named *Purpled, Grayson* joined the Slytherin table. Techno gripped both of his utensils impatiently and glared at his empty plate. He *needed* to drown out his sorrows in food. Unfortunately for him, though, McGonagall seemed intent on starving them all to death.

“Before we begin the feast,” she announced, prompting many other hungry students to groan in displeasure, “I would like to introduce our newest staff member to you all.”

“*Another* new professor?” George hissed.

“Due to increased strain on teachers caused by changes to the curriculum in recent years, I have decided to hire additional staff to assist in daily Hogwarts exercises. Please welcome Phil Watson, our new teaching assistant!”

*No way.*

The entire Ravenclaw table erupted in cheers as none other than Philza Magic himself stood up from his place at the High Table and gave everyone a wave. It was hard for Techno to resist the urge to sprint through the hall and throw his arms around the former Head Boy.

“Hello!” Philza greeted everyone cheerfully. “It’s good to be back! I’m lookin’ forward to helping out your professors this year and spending more time with all of you!”

Though the young man addressed his words to the whole crowd, his eyes found Techno’s from all the way across the hall. Before Phil went to sit back down, he shot the boys at the Ravenclaw table a purposeful wink.

The food soon arrived and everyone began stuffing their faces ravenously. The little first-year gremlin child seemed like much less of a problem after Techno got some food in his belly.

Philza was back, which meant the year was off to a great start.

Techno *definitely* wasn’t an unlucky person.

## Chapter End Notes

GUYS OMG can you believe there is a GLITCH on AO3 where some people who *think* they've left kudos have actually been UN-KUDOSSED? It's crazy! I trust that you *are* kudosed, but do me a favor and just scroll down and check to see ;)

Hope you liked the update! As always, your comments give me life. I literally cannot tell you guys the number of times I've felt sad and uninspired only to get a comment email and instantly feel better. It's hard to reply to all of 'em but trust me when I say that I read and smile at every single one.

See y'all next update!

Links to socials:

[ken's tumblr](#)

[grass' tumblr](#)

[ken's twitter](#)

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## Chapter Twenty-Two || Year Four

### Chapter Summary

Their fourth year at Hogwarts is off to an interesting start.

### Chapter Notes

Hello!

So if you follow me (ken) on Twitter you know why this update took a while. Went through something really shitty that made me physically unable to write romance for a bit :/ but we're back! It sure feels good to be in the writing mood again.

*DISCLAIMER:*

Grass and I are both going on the record and saying that we DO NOT SUPPORT Schlatt's recent racist, insensitive behavior. Some of the things he says are absolute disgusting horse shit. Please know that this character is merely based on his SMP role play and NOT the guy himself. This fic and fandom is meant to be a safe space where all sorts of identities are represented and celebrated, and we are very disappointed in IRL Schlatt and his irresponsible choices.

Now that that's out of the way,

FANART!!!!!!!!!!

omg guys I continue to be blown away by the fanart people tag me in on Twitter and Tumblr. If I missed yours this chapter, let me know and I'll add it ASAP! So please go check out:

[this](#) drawing of our squad on the train by imapiratematey!

[this](#) doodle of Gogi by MysticFeather!!!

[this](#) adorable drawing of our boys under da tree in the snow by ehtlog!

[this](#) ABSOLUTELY NUTS drawing of Dream in the lab by calhan! It's seriously so so so so so good pls click

[this](#) cute doodle of the SlytherClaw duo by softymiku!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was getting harder and harder for George to ignore everyday slights from his professors.

It wasn't like anyone in his classes was explicitly racist; on the contrary, many of his teachers and classmates went out of their ways to assure everyone that there was zero room for intolerance

within the walls of the castle. Still, George couldn't help but pick up on the subtle offense hidden in the undertones of certain comments.

They were little things. Fleeting compliments that sounded more like backhanded insults. Surreptitious glances directed his way whenever the W.A.P. was brought up. The Freudian slips were endless, and George wondered if they'd always been there or if he was just paying more attention to them now.

During their first D.A.D.A. lesson of the year, Professor Travers told them they'd be battling Boggarts.

"Now, now," she said as the room broke out into faint murmuring, "I understand that the idea of staring one's own worst fear in the face is frightening. It's *supposed* to be frightening. But learning how to perform defensive spells under stress is a crucial part of mastering the art of defense."

She walked over to a cupboard by her desk and knocked on the wooden frame. Immediately, some creature inside began to howl and rattle the piece of furniture, eliciting gasps from the seated fourth-years.

"The Boggart's in *there*?" one of the Slytherins in the back row asked disbelievingly.

"It is indeed," Professor Travers confirmed. "Who can tell me the correct incantation of the Boggart-repelling charm?"

George's hand shot up, as did those of most of his classmates. Professor Travers' eyes scanned the eager volunteers before she eventually smiled and motioned for George to answer.

"The incantation is *Riddikulus*, and the wand motion is horseshoe-shaped. Like this," he proceeded to demonstrate the correct movement with his wand, earning fond eye rolls from his roommates and a polite nod from the professor.

"Well done, Davidson," she praised, signalling for him to sit back down. "The breadth of your knowledge continues to impress me. You really are a credit to all those of Muggle descent."

George's pleased smile faltered at the compliment. No one else seemed to find the remark odd or off-putting, however, and the lesson continued. Professor Travers moved onto a practical demonstration of the spell followed by a five-minute pause to give everyone a chance to practice the incantation by themselves.

"Hey, George," Dream said, elbowing him in the side. "Can you tell me if I've got the wrist part down?"

When George took a moment too long to answer, Dream's brows furrowed in concern.

"Are you okay?" he asked the Ravenclaw, setting his wand down on his desk to give George his full attention. "What's up?"

George bit his lip and wondered how to go about explaining what was bothering him.

"You know when I answered Travers' question just now?" he eventually asked quietly. Dream nodded, still confused.

"Well," George continued, "didn't you find her comment a little bit...strange?"

Dream tilted his head curiously like an adorable puppy, blond hair flopping to one side. "What do

you mean?” he asked.

“When she said I was ‘a credit to all those of Muggle descent,’” George clarified. “Wasn’t that an odd thing to say?”

Dream’s eyes immediately widened in surprise before the Slytherin schooled his expression into something more neutral. “She was saying something *nice* about you, Gogi,” he assured his friend. “I think I know what you’re getting at, but Aurora wasn’t being *racist* or anything.”

George crossed his arms, unconvinced. “Why couldn’t she have just left it at ‘well done?’ Why did she have to add the Muggle nonsense after?”

Dream sighed. “George, you’re reading too much into this.”

George felt a twinge of irritation at his friend’s dismissal. “Don’t you see how the way she phrased it *implies* something?”

“No.”

George shook his head. “Of course *you* wouldn’t get it.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means you’d probably say the same thing.”

“What, compliment you? Of course I would, Gogi, you’re a genius.”

“Don’t call me that in the middle of class,” George snapped. He felt a gentle hand on his shoulder, then, and turned around to see Techno giving him a knowing look. Very deliberately, the pink haired boy shook his head.

*Not now*, he mouthed. George begrudgingly turned around and let the matter drop.

After a few more minutes of practicing the wand movements and incantation, Professor Travers motioned for everyone to quiet down. Once the fourth-years had all settled, she withdrew a key from her robe pocket and placed the tip of the metal tool into the cupboard’s lock.

“I think it’s time to practice what we’ve learned,” she announced. “Would anyone like to volunteer?”

Silence. Not a single person raised their hand.

The professor sighed. “Alright, then. Technoblade it is.”

Techno groaned but begrudgingly got up from his seat. The class watched with morbid curiosity as he shuffled to the front of the room and turned to face the cupboard with a bored expression on his face.

“Before I release the creature, I would like to remind all of you that there is no shame in being afraid. Fear is a natural human emotion, so I—”

“Professor, can we get this over with?” Techno asked in his deep monotone. Professor Travers huffed irritably in response.

“Eager, are we? Very well, then,” she remarked before throwing open the cupboard door and releasing the Boggart.

There was a loud crashing noise as the creature freed itself from its wooden prison. George watched with wide eyes as a tall human figure stumbled out and fell to the classroom floor with a cry of pain.

Several students stood up to get a better look, confused by the sight in front of them. Professor Travers kept her eyes on Techno, clearly prepared to intervene if the situation grew out of hand.

When George was finally able to get an unobstructed view of the Boggart, he could hardly hold back the gasp that escaped him.

Lying on the floorboards in a crumpled heap was a man, cowering behind his trembling, misshapen arm. The sleeves of his robes were torn, revealing deep scars and hand shaped burns spanning his forearms. Purple-yellow bruises littered every inch of exposed skin.

Techno took a step back, his eyes widening in horror. George could see his hands shaking as he held his wand up, pointing it at the broken man.

"No, *no*!" The man wailed, a cry tearing itself out of his throat at the sight of the wand, "Please, *please*, I have a wife— a-and a son! Please, I can't leave them— AH!" The protective arm in front of him suddenly twisted behind his back with a sickening crack.

The room echoed with the wet crunching sounds of the man's arm, twisting, stretching and pulling apart, away from his body.

"Technoblade!" Professor Travers yelled, noticing how the rest of the class began to shift uncomfortably at the sight before them, "The incantation!"

Techno's mouth opened, but no sound came out. His hand was practically vibrating with how hard it was shaking.

"C'mon, Techno..." George heard Dream mutter under his breath. George silently willed Professor Travers to step in and put an end to the encounter; Techno's fears were clearly getting the best of him.

Just when George was sure that Techno was going to pass out, he heard a voice behind him mutter something.

"Oh, for Merlin's sake." The voice's owner abruptly stood up and pushed past the crowd of students to reach their distressed classmate.

"Hey, Techno!" Wilbur said cheerfully, placing a hand on Techno's shoulder. George noticed how his roommate instantly flinched at the touch. "I was just thinking that it would be so *cool* if you were the first one in our class to defeat this thing, don't you think?"

"Mr. Soot, while I appreciate your efforts, other students are not permitted to interfere in this exercise—" Professor Travers began.

"Oh, of course not, Professor!" Wilbur exclaimed, squeezing Techno's shoulder in reassurance, "Techno is perfectly capable of beating this thing on his own, he's the *strongest* one in this class, after all! I just forgot to tell him before how he would look incredibly admirable, waving his wand around and casting that thing into oblivion before any of us could."

Professor Travers narrowed her eyes at the curly haired boy, but before she could open her mouth to tell him off again, Techno schooled his expression and held his wand forward.

"P-please—" the man on the ground pleaded, slowly crawling backwards.

"*Riddikulus!*" A bolt of light shot out of Techno's wand, cutting the man off as the blast slammed into his chest. Instantly, the figure emitted a bright burst of color and transformed into a miniature piglet wearing four tiny yellow Wellington boots on its hooves.

The whole class burst into laughter at the sight of the small animal, except Techno, who looked absolutely exhausted by the entire ordeal. He glanced up at Wilbur, who shot him a proud smile, matching it with a strained one of his own before shuffling over to his seat and promptly burying his head in his arms.

Their professor rolled her eyes at the laughing students before she stuffed the Boggart back into its cupboard and pressed her back against the door to keep it shut.

"Well done, Technoblade," she remarked, though the student in question looked to already be asleep, "Mr. Soot, I'll have to ask that *next time* you remember anything you have to say *before* any exercises take place, lest you interfere with the results."

Wilbur nodded dutifully, "Of course, professor, it won't happen again."

"Good," Inside the cupboard, the Boggart wailed. "Now, who would like to go next?"

One after another, George's classmates stepped up to the front of the room to confront their fears. Some were able to repel the Boggart with ease. Others struggled. A few were unable to even raise their wands.

George hadn't expected their first D.A.D.A. lesson of the year to be so...intimate. In having her students face off the amortal creature, Professor Travers was forcing each one of them to reveal a very personal aspect of their past. George felt like a voyeur shamelessly watching something he had absolutely no right to see.

After one of his Ravenclaw classmates successfully banished her vampiric Boggart, it was Wilbur's turn to face the closeted terror. As soon as his name was called, he made his way trepidatiously to where Travers awaited him with an expectant look on her face.

"Ready, Mr. Soot?" she asked far too pleasantly.

Wilbur shook his head. "No, I don't think I am."

The professor chuckled at the display of reluctance. "I'm releasing it in one, two...three!"

She let go of the cupboard door, then, and the whole class watched as a human figure tumbled out.

When the person stood up, George saw that Wil's Boggart had taken on the form of a teenage girl who couldn't have been taller than five-foot-two. Her round, black eyes scanned the room in confusion before landing directly on Wilbur, who gulped audibly.

"Willy?" she called out curiously, tossing her long, black fishtail braid over her shoulder.

The class let out a few snickers at the nickname, but were quickly silenced by Professor Travers. Wilbur gripped the wand in his hand tightly, his face turning a bright shade of red.

Dream nudged George and leaned over to whisper in his ear. "Is that who I think it is?"

"If you're thinking it's Sally, I'd say that yeah, probably." he whispered back.

Dream narrowed his eyes at the Boggart. "But isn't she supposed to be, like, the 'love of his life' or something? Why the heck is she his biggest fear?"

George shrugged. He hadn't the faintest clue why Wilbur would be terrified of his crush. Boggart-Sally wasn't even *dying* or anything, which was the case for most of the other Boggarts that took the shape of someone's loved one. George supposed they'd all have to find out the reason behind the creature's form by simply watching.

"Do you know where Tommy's run off too, Willy?" the Boggart-girl inquired with a tilt of her head. "I could've sworn he was here just a minute ago."

Wilbur didn't respond to the question. His face turned an even darker shade of red.

Sally frowned and took a few hesitant steps forward. "Are you feeling alright, Willy? Why aren't you saying anything?" Slowly, she outstretched a hand towards the boy, the movement causing the image of the salmon on her shoulder to wriggle distractingly as though swimming along her arm.

George winced. Techno had been right — it was a *very* ugly tattoo.

Wilbur took a step back, swallowing hard as he held up his wand. "I-I'm—" he stuttered pathetically, his expression a mixture of fright and anguish.

A sudden shift in Sally's demeanor occurred, then, her smile falling and expression contorting into a mask of pure disgust. "You can't be serious, Willy. *You* fancy me?"

Wilbur hung his head in shame and defeat. When George squinted, he could make out tears welling up in his eyes.

"I-I...I *love* y-you, S-Sally..." the boy began to sob, falling to his knees. "P-please..."

Sally cackled at the pitiful display. "Why would I ever fancy *you*? You're a weak child who smells awful, and your music is shite. The mere thought of you makes me sick."

The cruel words seemed to hit Wilbur like a series of bullets to the chest. He sank to the floor in a heap, wrapping his arms around his long legs and beginning to rock back and forth in a feeble little ball. His wand clattered to the floor beside him as his body shook with a particularly violent sob.

Eret nervously wrung his hands and tried to approach their friend only to be halted by a glare from Professor Borealis. "Sit back down, Eretson," she instructed.

"But, Professor, I really don't think he'll be able to banish it by himself," Eret said, gesturing to the whimpering mess that was Wil. Professor Travers sighed and bent down to where Wilbur was still cringing away from his Boggart.

"Mr. Soot, the spell is *Riddikulus*," she said in an even voice, hoping to snap her student out of his sorry state. Unfortunately for her, it was difficult for Wilbur to focus on anything except for the girl still mercilessly hurling insults at him.

"I'd sooner go for a bloody Samsung Smart Refrigerator than you!" Sally screamed. "In fact, I'd sooner go for *Tommy* than you!"

"Yikes," Dream muttered. George couldn't agree more.

Finally after what felt like an eternity, Professor Travers banished the Boggart with a flick of her wand. It took the combined efforts of both Eret and Techno to get Wilbur back on his feet and to his desk, which ended up being a bit of a lost cause as the curly haired boy promptly slid to the floor and curled in on himself again.

“Er...alright,” Professor Travers said in an attempt to redirect her students’ attention, “Who would like to go next?”

There were only a handful of students remaining who had not already faced the Boggart, and George was painfully aware of the fact that he was one of them. He made sure to avoid looking the professor in the eyes as she scanned the classroom for eligible victims.

“Mr. Davidson!” she called out. “Your turn!”

George groaned and forced himself to stand up from his desk. Dream shot him an apologetic look as he made his way to the front and faced the closet.

“Alright, Mr. Davidson, you know what comes next. Remember the incantation,” the professor instructed, preparing to release the Boggart. Right before she could open the wooden doors, however, a loud ringing noise penetrated their ears and brought George a sigh of relief.

“Already?” Professor Travers grumbled. “These class periods are far too short. Oh, well. Class dismissed!”

When George got back to his desk he found that Dream had already assembled his things in a neat little pile for him. The thoughtful gesture made George’s heart stutter in his chest.

“Saved by the bell, huh?” Dream teased, handing the shorter boy a stack of textbooks and parchment.

“Thank god,” George replied. He and Dream quickly found the other Ravenclaw boys and began the walk down to the Great Hall for lunch, chatting idly on the way. While Dream was absorbed in a conversation with Wilbur about the differences between Muggle and wizard music, Techno nudged George in the arm and bent down to mutter something in his ear.

“You were right back there,” he said lowly. “What Travers said to you was messed up.”

George nodded at the reminder of their professor’s insensitive words. “It was so unnecessary.”

“Trust me, I get it,” the pink haired boy agreed. “But a lotta these people are just so used to this crap that they can’t recognize the implications of what they say.”

George chances a glance at Dream out of the corner of his eye. The Slytherin boy was laughing carefreely at something Wilbur said, the freckles near the corners of his green eyes scrunching up in a way that made George want to reach up and smooth out the skin with his fingertips.

Techno followed George’s gaze. “Selwyn’s always been problematic, ya know,” he mutters under his breath. “Ten million racist things fall outta his mouth every day. I don’t know how you put up with him.”

George blushed and averted his eyes. “Ten million is a bit of an exaggeration,” he murmured.

Techno snorted and shook his head. “If I had a knut for every time I’ve wanted to deck him in the face, I’d be a millionaire.”

"He's learning," George huffed, shooting Techno a glare.

"Hmph. Oughtta learn quicker, if y'ask me."

Their hushed conversation came to an end when the group arrived at the Great Hall and hurriedly began piling their empty plates full of various smoked meats and mashed potatoes. All throughout the meal, George kept sneaking glances at Techno, his roommate's parting words ringing in his ears.

Dream wasn't *racist*. George knew that. They'd been best friends since George even knew what magic *was*. Dream just had a tendency to speak without thinking, but it wasn't a racist thing.

So then why couldn't George brush off the fact that Dream saw nothing wrong with Travers' comment?

Uncomfortable with his own thoughts, George made an effort to busy himself with speaking to Eret about schoolwork. It helped; Eret was easy to talk to. They chatted idly about charms until their lunch period was over and it was time to head off to their afternoon History of Magic class.

Whatever Techno thought of him, Dream was George's best friend. No one knew Dream like George did. The blond had a good, un-racist heart, and that wasn't going to change on George's watch.

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The beginning of the year was the best time to be in the library. Classes were only just starting, so most people didn't find it necessary to be studying so early. The best tables were empty, the librarians turned a blind eye to the snacks being snuck in, and if George had a book he was looking for, chances were it was still available.

Only "giant nerds," as Dream had put it, spent their time there at this time of year. So, needless to say, all four Ravenclaw roommates found themselves situated around one of the large round tables in the back.

George didn't mind being a nerd, though. Anyway, Dream always ended up retracting his statement by the end of the year when exam season rolled around.

"Come on, are you *really* going to ditch me for a bunch of books, Gogi?" Dream whined, bumping his shoulder into George's as he followed him towards the library.

"Yes, I am. I didn't get a chance to read ahead in our curriculum over the summer because of all my jobs so I really need to get on it now. Besides, everyone is already waiting for me. You *could* join us if you want to." He offered for the umpteenth time.

"Not a chance. I'll go bother Bad instead, I think. Have fun with your lame nerd things, nerd."

With a sigh, George pushed the doors to the library open, nodding a greeting at the librarian before shuffling over to their usual table. He turned around a familiar corner, glancing at the books on the bottom row as he did so, and immediately crashed into an unsuspecting figure standing in his path.

"Ow! Where'd you come from?!" George groaned, rubbing at his side. He immediately felt a pang of guilt once he realized that he'd just blamed a complete stranger for his own clumsiness, but the person started talking before he had the chance to apologize.

"Ow, sorry big man, didn't realize where I was standing." The stranger chuckled, sounding

suspiciously familiar. "But you didn't realize where you were walking, yeah? You've really got to watch out, you know, it's rather *rude* to go bumping into people when they're just trying to find a book. Next time you might run into some real *mean* bastard, and— and he won't be as nice as me, I'll tell you that. See, *I* might be a forgiving man, but not everyone here's like that. There are some really fuckin backwards people in this place, you know? Well, you probably know if you're *from* this place, but *I'm* not from here— I mean, of course I'm from the UK, I love the queen, I'm certainly not *American* like some of these wizard people. Which is fuckin weird, by the way, that so many Americans are at this British school, dont you think— er— what was your name again?"

George blinked a couple of times, needing a moment to process the mountain of words that had just been piled on top of him. "Erm, I—" he began, but the words caught in his throat as soon as he looked up to face the stranger.

"Well? What's wrong? Have I got something on my face? Other than my charming smile, of course," he grinned, showing off his braces. "Erm, seriously though, have I?"

"You're Tommy." George blurted out, followed immediately by a mental facepalm.

The first-year blinked in surprise at the statement before his grin grew impossibly wider. "Yes, yes, of course! That's me, Tommy, the greatest wizard to *ever* be born! I *told* Tubbo that the wizard people would all know my name soon! Oh, it's so cool, you know, you're the *first* fan to recognize me! Once I have a lot more it'll be hard to get my autograph, so you should probably ask for it now."

George stayed silent, unsure how he should respond.

"Actually, you know what?" Tommy paused, glancing down at his bare wrist, "I have a bit of time now, so I think I'll spend it with *you*! Isn't that exciting? You get to hang out with THE Tommy!" He exclaimed, linking his arm with George's before the Ravenclaw could hope to talk his way out of the situation.

George let himself be pulled further into the library as Tommy prattled on about himself. His mind quickly ran through a bunch of excuses he could give the child in order to escape, but before he was able to settle on one, he noticed that the path Tommy was taking was far too recognizable.

Almost as if directed by the strings of fate, Tommy had accidentally made his way dangerously close to the secluded table where his Ravenclaw roommates were waiting. And with only a second for George's stomach to fill with dread, the boy had weaseled his way past the small space between two bookcases and came to a stop in front of the table.

A tense silence filled the air around George as two, horrified looking Ravenclaws met the eyes of one, shell-shocked Gryffindor.

The entire group stood frozen in place for several agonizing moments before the silence was shattered by a defeated-sounding Technoblade.

"So uhh...does that killin' curse work on myself, or do we have t' cast it on each other?"

"Holy *shit*! What the hell— what the *fuck* are YOU doing here?!" Tommy screeched, tearing his arm away from George to point an accusatory finger at Wilbur and Techno.

"Would you believe us if we said we got lost n' were just leavin'?" Techno said, wincing.

"How the fuck— that's not fair! How does everyone I know already have magic before me! That's — I'll tell you what that is, it's bullshit!" Tommy declared, "You all planned this ahead of time,

didn't you? Yeah! What the fuck?! Does the whole world have magic and *I'm* the only one who didn't know?! I mean, Tubbo makes sense, he is rather cool. Not as cool as me, of course, but I would never be friends with someone that's *not* cool. But you guys?! Wilbur's not cool! And Technoblade is a bitch! You can't be wizards!"

Techno nodded, "Yeah, you're right. Guess we should be leavin' then. C'mon Wilbur, pick your jaw up off the floor, we're goin' home." He grabbed Wilbur by the arm and began dragging him away. "Sayonara, it's been awful catchin' up with you. See ya... hopefully never, we're out."

"Wait wait wait! Hold on! You can't just fuckin' *leave* now!" Tommy spluttered, launching himself forward and grabbing onto the sleeve of Techno's robe, "Explain yourselves, you bastards!"

"Nothin' to explain, you were right, I'm not a wizard, *he's* not a wizard— what even *is* a wizard anyway? Bye, Tommy! *Obscuro!*"

Techno cast the charm so quickly that Tommy didn't have time to react before a tight, black blindfold suddenly appeared over his eyes. The blond child immediately began clawing at the fabric in an attempt to get it off his face, bumping into a nearby bookshelf in his struggle and causing several tomes to hit the floor with a *thud*. By the time Tommy was finally able to pry the black cloth off, Techno and Wilbur were nowhere to be seen.

"What the *fuck!*" Tommy yelled in frustration. "Not a wizard my *arse!* Did you see that, man?" he said to George, who nodded dumbly.

"That was an impressive charm, yes," George replied.

"Ho, boy, I'm going to let those two bastards have it, I am," Tommy muttered, a determined expression now on his face. "I'm terribly sorry that I can't spend more time with you, but I promise I'll make time for an autograph later. I have to find those two and give them a piece of my mind."

George shrugged, already pitying his two roommates. "That's alright, Tommy. I understand."

"Thanks, Big Man. You're alright, you are. What's your name?"

"Um...Eret," George lied.

"There's another one of those weird sounding wizard names— right, see you 'round, then, Ferret!" Tommy exclaimed before bolting down the hallway in the direction Techno and Wilbur had fled. George let out a sigh and made his way back to his seat, shaking his head at the child's antics.

He had a feeling that life in the castle was going to get a lot more hectic.

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Dream didn't know *why* the sight of Minx sitting by herself in the dark Slytherin common room made him pause, but it did.

He'd just returned to the dungeons for the night after a game of Gobstones when he caught sight of the girl curled up in an armchair, blanketed by shadows. It wasn't like it was unusual for Minx to be studying in the common area by herself — the witch detested company when she was trying to study — but she didn't usually look so *sad*.

Dream's feet led him to stand in front of her before he even knew what he was doing. Her blue eyes looked up from her textbook to shoot him an angry glare.

“What?” she demanded. “Go away.”

Dream rolled his eyes at the predictable response. “Why’re you all alone in the dark?”

“Studying, you illiterate eejit,” she spat, looking pointedly at the Charms textbook in her lap. Dream hummed and took a seat on the sofa across from her, resting his chin in the palm of his hand.

Minx did *not* look happy to have company. “Oi, what the *fuck*, Selwyn? I said to go away, not to make yerself at bloody home.”

Ignoring her comments, Dream yawned and stretched his back until it gave several satisfying pops. “Where’s Schlatt?” he asked.

“I don’t fuckin’ know. What am I, his fuckin’ secretary?”

Dream smirked. “Well, kinda.”

It was the wrong thing to say. Minx huffed and stood up from her chair, angrily shoving her textbook under her arm and stomping off towards the girls’ dormitories.

“Hey, wait, Minx—”

“I’m not gonna fuckin’ sit here and be bullied by a fuckin’ hypocrite,” she snapped. “I’m going to bed. Have a fuckin’ miserable night, Selwyn.”

The slam of her dormitory door echoed throughout the dungeon, signalling that Dream was alone.

Why *had* he sat down next to Minx? He knew she was just going to cuss him out and leave, so why did he bother?

*Maybe you feel bad*, the traitorous voice in the back of his head whispered.

Dream shook his head. What did *he* have to feel bad for? *He* wasn’t the racist asshole, *she* was. She was the one who threw around slurs like they were nothing and freaking *attacked* Techno and Karl. And she was going to attack George! *George!* He didn’t owe shit to anyone who wanted to hurt George.

He scowled at the memory of the infamous hit list. The whole thing made his blood boil.

Eric was the only one in their dorm room when Dream entered. The idiot grinned when he saw the blond and tried to strike up a conversation. Needless to say, Dream was *not* in the mood.

“Oi, Selwyn!” his roommate greeted from his spot on his bed. “My mum sent me an owl this morning, and guess what? Your dad is coming to our manor for tea tomorrow! If our fathers are friends, maybe that means you can visit our Swiss chalet during the winter holiday!”

“Oh, interesting,” Dream said disinterestedly, throwing his bag at the foot of his own bed.

“Yeah! If you prefer, I could probably convince Mum to let us spend the holiday at our house in Hawaii, instead! That’d be fun!”

“Cool,” Dream threw over his shoulder before ducking into their shared bathroom and locking the door, effectively cutting off the conversation.

Man, Eric was such a dumbass. Just another snobby rich pureblood kid who had no sense of

reality. From what Dream knew of the kid's parents, they were both disgusting elitist supremacists who refused to set foot in Muggle-populated areas. It was a wonder the kid was even allowed to attend Hogwarts with how stuck-up his parents were—

*Wait a minute.*

As he met the eyes of his reflection in the bathroom mirror, something inside of Dream clicked.

Couldn't the exact same thing be said about Dream? That he was just another snobby rich pureblood kid with asshole parents? What gave him the right to think he was so much better than Eric when their circumstances were nearly identical?

*Because you're not like your parents. You have Muggle-born friends. You don't think like they do.*

"Shower on," he muttered, activating the watering charms in the shower stall. Lukewarm water began to rain from the cubicle ceiling.

Dream *wasn't* a racist. The only thing he and his father had in common was their dumb name, which he was probably going to legally change one day just to piss his family off. He'd pick something cool and badass, like Dream Nightmare. Now *that* was a cool name. Or he could pick something with alliteration, like Dream Deathbringer. Or Dream Dangerblood. Or Dream Davidson.

He froze at the thought, letting the shower water run down his body in rivulets.

The thought was just a coincidence. It was only *natural* that the name Davidson popped into his head given that he spent so much of his time around George. It wasn't like he actually wanted to have the same last name as his best friend. He didn't want to *marry* him or anything like that.

Ha. Marry George. Like he'd ever marry *George*. George was a dude. A Muggle-born dude. His parents would probably strangle him if he ever married George.

It *was* a funny thought, though. Just a silly thought.

He shut the water off with a whispered command.

He took a deep breath before towelling himself off and donning his pyjamas. Eric was, unfortunately, still wide awake and playing with a deck of Exploding Snap cards on his bed, but Dream ignored his attempts to continue their earlier "conversation."

Dream had places to be. Well, one specific place, to be exact, and that place was a certain girl's dorm room.

He owed someone an apology.

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Unfortunately for George's roommates, Tommy showed up to the Ravenclaw table the following morning for breakfast.

"Shit, Tommy at five o'clock," Wilbur hissed upon noticing the approaching first-year.

"How long do we have until he gets 'ere?" Techno asked, shoveling the remains of his breakfast down his throat.

"T-minus twenty seconds, let's go!" Wilbur cried, tugging at Techno's arm. Unluckily for the two

Ravenclaws, however, Technoblade happened to stand up at the exact same time as Wilbur attempted to pull him backwards. The motion sent both of them hurtling into a giant pot of oatmeal in the center of the table. The pot of porridge fell over as if in slow motion, tipping its contents over both the boys' heads and coating them in lumpy hot porridge.

Their housemates winced and let out sympathetic groans of disgust, but no one offered any help. Wilbur and Techno were forced to huddle together pathetically while they awaited their demise.

"Ello, boys! I've finally found you!" Tommy declared, inviting himself to take a seat beside George as Wilbur and Techno groaned. "I've been trying to find the lot of you for *ages*! You know for two freakishly tall giants with very distinguishable features, you're quite easy to lose in this school. You wouldn't *believe* what kind of people go to this place, I mean, you just blend right in! Did you know they have a fuckin *furry* in here? And he's allowed to wear his fuckin fursuit in all his classes too?! That's just fuckin weird, man, and— and they have this one woman who's hair keeps changing colors every other day, whats up with that? I mean, I know you can dye your hair but why does she have to do it so much? And— hold on, what the fuck are you two bastards wearing?"

"Wizard fashion, here, try some on," Techno said, grabbing a clump of oats out of his hair and smashing it onto Tommy's head.

"Hey— HEY what the FUCK was that for!" Tommy screeched, leaping to his feet and shaking bits of oatmeal all over the place, "You're a fuckin *bitch*, Technoblade! You fuckin wanker you- you pink bastard! I just came here to say hello and make peace with you! I woulda said— I woulda went, 'Listen Technobitch and Wil...bitch, I know we got off on the wrong foot, but since we're all wizards here, we should call a truce' and you woulda said, 'yes of course Tommy, you're so cool, we've always secretly wanted to be your friends' and then it would've been fine! But instead you *attack me* with this— what the fuck is this anyway?! With this *sludge*! What a warm fuckin welcome this is, even better than the bastards that asked me to give them my blood so I could get a wand!"

The table froze, the only noise passing between them being Tommy's grumblings as he picked oatmeal out of his hair.

"Sorry, could you repeat that?" Techno asked, his tone growing cold.

"What, you don't know your own weird wizard customs?!" Tommy rolled his eyes, "The bloody wand seller man, he made me go through this whole fuckin show just to see which wand would work best for me, and then he doesn't even fuckin give it to me! Says some shit about 'blood donations' and 'squirrels' and 'wraps' and long story short I can't even buy the wand unless I give him my blood! Of course I told him he was mental and that I'm a fuckin minor so if he touches me with his weird magic needles I'd call a fuckin lawyer— I'd get the queen involved, she'd be right pissed to know that I'm not gettin *my* wand because some asshole wants my blood. And then, get this, I go to leave and tell Tubbo that this place is fucked up, and he tells me that he got his wand **WITHOUT** having to pay with his fuckin blood!"

The occupants of the Ravenclaw table all gaped at Tommy's revelation, stunned into silence. The oatmeal George had been eating churned unpleasantly in his stomach, threatening to come back up. Tommy glared at the upperclassmen, unaware of the implications of what he'd just said.

"Why'd you lot go all quiet now, got nothin to say? Of course you don't, you just like attacking and interrogating minors like a bunch of weirdos." He gagged as he pulled more oats out of his hair, "I thought this was the fuckin smart table, at least that's what everyone *else* says, but if you two are here it's probably the dumb table. What're you called again? Ravencocks? That's a weird fuckin—"

“Uh, kid, *who* did you say took your blood?” Dream asked, cutting off Tommy's rambling.

“Are you fuckin *American*? ” Tommy sneered, shooting Dream a look of pure disgust and completely ignoring the question, “Of course *you* haven't been listening, with your fuckin 'howdy guns beer beer trucks—' that's what your brain is like, all day. There's way too fuckin many of you here, you know that? That fuckin bandana guy and Technobitch were already *enough*, I can tolerate two of you people, but a THIRD ONE?! Are there any *other* surprise Americans I should know about? I mean, we're in the *UK*, don't you have a fuckin magic school in your states? Is it that shit there that they don't even have magic schools? I mean—”

"Tommy, who the *hell* asked you for your blood?!" Techno snapped, slamming his hands down on the table and dripping oatmeal onto Eret's plate.

"Woah, geez, relax big man, I said you were one of the good ones," Tommy winced, holding his hands up defensively "It was the fuckin stick seller, Old Liver or some shit."

Eret cleared his throat. “Do you mean Ollivander? The old man with the long white beard?”

Tommy lowered his hands and gave Eret an unimpressed look. “Every other bloke I see in this place has a long white beard. The one I’m talking about looks like he tucks himself into his grave every night, he's just waiting to fuckin drop already. When do wizards even retire? His shop says it’s been running since 382 B.C., but surely he isn’t *that* old. That’s fuckin impossible is what that is—”

“Tommy, wouldya shut up for a second and let us do some thinkin’ here?” Techno snapped. When the Gryffindor boy begrudgingly closed his mouth, he lowered his voice and continued, “Did Ollivander personally take your blood, or was it someone else?”

Tommy scrunched up his nose while the others waited with bated breath for his answer. “The really old one wrote my name down and gave me my wand. Then he asked me for my ‘blood status,’ whatever the fuck that is, and then I said ‘I have no clue, mate, can I please have my wand now’ and he said ‘are you Muggle-born’ and I said ‘what’s that supposed to mean, did you just cuss at me?!’ and then he said—”

“*Tommy.*”

“Right, right, I'll get on with it— So he took out something that looked like one of those test tubes they use in chemistry classes and then said some magic words or something and my finger was suddenly fucking bleeding. Then he made the blood go into the tube like he was on of those fuckin waterbenders from *Avatar*, and then he had the *nerve* to tell me the *price* of the wand! As if I didn't just pay him with blood— do you know how much blood goes for on the market?! I could've bought *ten* wands with my blood if I wanted to.”

The older students exchanged worried looks, wondering what this new information meant. When George looked at Dream, he saw that the Slytherin boy was deep in thought.

I wonder if he’s thinking about his father. Selwyn Sr. definitely has everything to do with this.

Then Dream opened his mouth and George facepalmed.

“What’s *Avatar*?”

Tommy scoffed “Did you just ask me what *Avatar* is? Is your country really that *shit* that you don't get *Avatar* over there? Are you fucking *stupid*, mate?”

“No,” Dream huffed, crossing his arms. “I asked you a reasonable question. Are you going to answer it?”

“Water. Earth. Fire. Air. Long ago, the four nations lived together in harmony. Then, everything changed when the Fire Nation attacked. Only the Avatar, master of all four elements—”

Techno abruptly stood up, shaking oatmeal clumps out of his hair as he did so. “I can’t believe this,” he grumbled. “A genocide in the makin’ and they wanna talk about a *kids’ show*.”

“Fuck off!” Tommy exclaimed, defensive. “It’s not a fuckin kids’ show, you’re just a joyless bitch who wouldn’t know fun if it clocked him in the fuckin head!”

“Will you just tell me what it is already?” Dream demanded. Wilbur nodded, too, much to Techno’s chagrin.

“I have to admit, I’m curious about this *Avatar* thing as well. What did you say it was, Tommy? A ‘show?’ Is that like those ‘movie’ things? Like— what was that bloke’s name again— like Shrek?”

Techno sighed and looked at George disappointedly. Though they exchanged no words, the brief eye contact was its own silent message of solidarity. *Can you believe this?* Techno’s stare seemed to ask. George grimaced in response.

No. I can’t.

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When George entered the library on a pleasant Saturday afternoon, he was surprised to see that his usual table was already occupied by several students in yellow-lined robes.

*That’s odd*, he thought to himself. *Hufflepuffs aren’t usually here this time of day.*

He shrugged, resolving to simply find a seat elsewhere to work on his Potions homework, but Karl caught his eye across the room before he could find another table. The Hufflepuff fourth-year waved him over excitedly and called out his name.

“George!” the boy said cheerfully, “Come join us!”

The other Hufflepuffs were all staring at him at that point, which put George in the only *slightly* awkward position of having to approach the table. He hadn’t come into the library with the intention of socializing, but he supposed a little small talk with his Hufflepuff friends wouldn’t hurt him.

When George came closer, he noticed that every single student at the table was in a different year. There was Bad, who wore his shiny new prefect badge proudly over his heart. A girl George recognized as Wilbur’s friend, Niki, was sitting between a kid with giant sunglasses and a familiar ‘furry’, as Tommy had put it the other day.

Even though Tommy wasn’t physically present, the first-year seemed to haunt every place George went. As he was beckoned over to take a seat beside Karl, he couldn’t help but feel a sense of dread overtake him when he recognized the *other* first-year he’d have to sit beside.

"Hi George!" Bad grinned, "I haven't seen you around in a while, it's nice to finally bump into you again!"

"Yeah, definitely." George nodded, keeping an eye on the Hufflepuff first-year beside him, "Uh,

you should come to our table sometime so we could all catch up."

"Or maybe *you* could come join *us*," Karl retorted, "And bring everyone else too!"

"Karl, you know that's not really allowed—" Bad began, clearly prepared to launch into a prefect spiel.

"Really? Because every time *Skeppy* wants to come sit with us it doesn't *look* like it's not allowed," Fundy cut in, rolling his eyes. "Do you know how many times he put weird stuff in the soup bowls to prank us?!"

Bad shook his head.

"Me neither! *That's* how many times it's been!"

"Well..." Bad pursed his lips, "*Fine*, I guess you guys can come too. Besides, we're all friends! It doesn't count if it's friends."

"*Sure* it doesn't," the fox boy huffed, his ears flattening against his head.

"Um, so, who *is* this guy anyway?" The kid with sunglasses asked, pointing a finger at George.

"Yeah, I'm feeling a bit left out," Tommy's friend chuckled.

George shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "Erm, sorry about that, my name is George. I'm a fourth-year Ravenclaw."

"Fourth-year Ravenclaw?" Sunglasses asked, leaning forward with sudden interest, "Does that mean you know Technoblade?"

"Sammy, no quidditch talk in the library!" scolded Bad.

"I *wasn't* talking about quidditch, I asked if he knew Technoblade." Sammy replied petulantly. "Well?"

"Uh, yeah, he's one of my roommates—"

"*Roommates!* That's actually insane. He's the biggest quidditch sweat out there! Even *Eighty* said so, and he thinks everyone's 'free'. To be fair though, if people like *Astelic* are allowed on the pitch, then this game—"

"Hey, Sammy?" Tommy's friend interrupted, "Maybe you should go practice some quidditch now. You don't wanna lose your place on the team because you're *slacking*, right?"

Sammy paused. "That's actually a good idea. I'll have to grind hard so I can catch GB80 off guard next game."

"Sammy, wait—! Oh, he's gone," Bad sighed. "You know, I was really hoping to be able to get that muffinhead away from that game for a few hours."

"Hey, at least he's being active. Imagine if he no-lifed a game where he just *sat* all day and did nothing," Karl snickered.

"That's a thing that Muggles do, actually," said Tommy's friend. "They're called video games."

"How do you know about Muggle stuff?" George asked, "You're not Muggle-born."



The first-year narrowed his eyes at George suspiciously. "How do *you* know? Maybe I am."

George hesitated. Well, there was no point in avoiding the inevitable, he supposed. "Because you're Tommy's friend. He told us about you and the wand shop, so I put two and two together..."

The boy grinned. "Oh! Well, Tommy didn't mention you. He only mentioned 'Technobitch' and 'Wilbitch' —"

"*Language*, Tubbo!" Bad cried.

"Sorry, sorry, but I know both of those guys and you're not them."

"Yeah that's... definitely not me." George nodded. "But how *do* you know about Muggle stuff?"

"Easy," Tubbo shrugged. "Muggle stuff isn't *that* complicated. Also, my mum and dad thought that waiting until I was eleven to go to school was a waste of time. I went to Muggle school before I came here."

"That's really cool!" Niki exclaimed. "My parents made me study maths, English and Spanish before I went to school, but I always wanted to learn those subjects in a classroom. We moved a lot so they thought that those would be the most important subjects to know."

"Yeah, I was forced to study English, too," said Fundy. "My parents knew I'd be going to Hogwarts when I got older so they made me sit down and watch English Muggle videos until my brain melted."

"That's not fair! I had to study, like, five times as much as you!" Tubbo cried. "Do you— do you know how *awkward* it was when Tommy started asking me what Middle School I'd be going to? I had to pretend like I didn't know that the both of us would be throwing spells at each other next year!"

"You *knew* that your Muggle friend was a wizard?" Niki asked.

"Well, it was pretty obvious. Anybody who met him would be able to tell."

"That's not what Techno and Wil were saying..." George muttered.

"Yeah, well, I was waving magic around right under their noses for a year and they didn't catch on, so I'm not surprised," Tubbo snorted. "They really didn't try at *all* to hide the fact that they were wizards, you know? Wilbur wore *robes* and sent off letters by owl right in front of our faces. If he'd been allowed to perform magic outside of school I think he'd have *Flipendo* 'd us as well."

George grimaced at the thought of his roommate cursing a child. It was a good thing laws against underage magic existed.

Bad seemed to echo George's thoughts. "Let's all be thankful for the statutes against underage magic," he said.

"Yeah, but it's okay. I made sure he got his fair share of trips to pay him back," Tubbo replied. "I *seriously* don't know how they didn't catch me, though. I was almost as obvious as them except I was *actually* doing magic."

"You could do wandless magic?" Karl asked.

"That's really advanced!" Bad added.

"Nah, not really. I could never do specific spells, just light magic when I needed it. Like if I needed it to look like someone took a bite out of Techno's ice cream when he wasn't paying attention. Or if I needed Wilbur to suddenly look very ill when he was trying to talk to the girl he likes."

Karl laughed out loud. "You're *diabolical!*"

George chuckled along with the Hufflepuff students as the conversation moved to other lighthearted topics. Several of the students in Hufflepuff, including Karl and Bad, had apparently auditioned for and failed to join the Hogwarts frog choir with their pet toads and were very angry about the matter.

"Flitwick called Honkers *tone deaf!* Can you even believe it, Gogi? Your Head of House is so mean!" Karl huffed.

George snorted, thinking it was a joke, but apparently the Hufflepuff was being serious. "Oh," he said, smoothing out his features, "I'm sorry. That sounds...uh...bad."

Bad nodded. "He didn't let Mr. Rat and I in, either. I think it's discrimination. He has a *clear* preference for Ravenclaw toads."

Fundy swished his tail. "I thought your toad's name was Rat. Why is he Mr. Rat all of the sudden?"

Bad rolled his eyes as if he'd had to explain this particular detail several times already. "*Because*, Fundy, I already have a dog named Rat at home. I can't have *two* pets named Rat, so instead of calling them Rat One and Rat Two, this one is Mr. Rat!"

Tommy's sidekick — *Tubbo*, George reminded himself — tilted his head, looking confused. "Why would you name a dog and a toad Rat in the first place?"

Niki put a hand on Tubbo's shoulder and shook her head. "Don't ask," she whispered.

"Don't you already have a pet owl, Bad?" George asked. "I thought students were allowed one pet each, so how come you have two?"

"Corruption," Fundy supplied, earning a glare from Bad.

"It's not corruption, Fundy," Karl said, "we're calling it *prefect privilege*."

Bad nodded. "Plus, Bonnie is *technically* a shared owl. She only sleeps in the Hogwarts Owlery half the time, and I *need* her for newspaper delivery, so she's not *really* a pet." The Hufflepuff prefect pulled out a rolled up copy of *The Daily Prophet* to emphasize his point. He was about to tuck it back into his robes when George spotted something printed on the front page that made him snatch the paper from Bad on instinct.

"Hey!" Bad complained as George unrolled the newspaper. "That's *my* copy, you muffin!"

"Who still gets newspapers delivered?" Tubbo wondered aloud.

"It's important to be informed, Tubbo."

"I don't even remember the last time I picked up a newspaper. That stuff makes my head hurt."

"Just because *you* can't read doesn't mean—"

"Wait, wait, guys, look," George interrupted, pointing to a headline. The other Hufflepuffs quickly

leaned in closer to see what had captured George's attention. Karl was the first to read the name printed at the top of the page.

"Oh, look!" he said pleasantly. "It's Techno's mom! Good for her!"

"Er...I don't think it's a 'good' kind of story, Karl. Read the subtitle," George answered.

On the cover was a moving photograph of a woman George recognized as Technoblade's mother. She was dressed more formally than George had ever seen her — her hair was pinned intricately atop her head and her well-manicured nails matched the deep crimson color of her dress. The look in her eyes bore a striking resemblance to the steely determination often reflected in those of her son. It was a very flattering portrayal of the woman, but that wasn't what had caught George's eye; no, it was the words *above* the photograph that gave him pause.

**WARTIME WIDOW SPEAKS OUT**, proclaimed the headline in bold lettering. The subtitle underneath was equally striking: *"This is not what my husband died for," said Claire Technoblade regarding new W.A.P. research initiatives.*

Bad hummed thoughtfully. "They did a really great job with the photograph. Mrs. Technoblade looks lovely."

"Who, Technobitch's mum?"

"*Language*, Tubbo! Don't make me take House Points!"

"You can't take House Points for saying the word 'bitch, '" Fundy said.

"One point from Hufflepuff, Fundy!"

"What the fuck, man?!"

"Another point from Hufflepuff!"

As the Hufflepuff students continued to squabble, George exchanged a worried glance with Karl. The two Muggle-born boys were the only ones who seemed remotely concerned by the newspaper article.

"This is a good thing, right, George?" Karl asked nervously. "I mean, if more people talk about the W.A.P., then maybe they'll realize it's kinda weird to be having all these blood drives."

George bit his lip. "I hope so," he murmured. Even though there was nothing *inherently* wrong with the article, the fact that one of his friends' parents was in the spotlight sent a tiny shiver of worry down his spine. "I really hope so."

That image of Mrs. Technoblade with the headline above her head remained in George's head throughout the rest of the day.

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"You should give Minx a chance."

George looked up from the Potions textbook he'd been reading and shot Dream a questioning look.

"What?" he asked, confused by his best friend's sudden appearance and unprompted piece of advice. "What do you mean, 'give Minx a chance?' You told me never to speak to her again."

Dream winced at George's response and plopped himself down in an empty chair beside him. The Slytherin boy had a look on his face that George couldn't quite place, which was highly unusual given that George could almost *always* tell what Dream was thinking.

"About that..." Dream said, biting his lip. "I think I overreacted. I think you should let her talk to you."

George scoffed and put down his textbook in favor of staring Dream directly in the eyes. Something wasn't adding up. "What happened?"

"Huh? Nothing happened."

"You're lying. It's not like you to change your mind about something out of the blue," George insisted. "Are you alright? Did she threaten you? Have you been put under the Imperius curse or something?"

For some reason, Dream buried his face in his hands and groaned at the mention of the unforgivable curse. "No, *I* wasn't Imperiused, I just- George, just give her a chance, okay?"

George crossed his arms and shook his head. "Dream, she called me a mudblood."

"I know. "

"You told me it wasn't the first time she's used that word, either."

"I *know*."

"You also told me she kicked you in the bollocks when you told her what she did was racist."

"I kn—okay, well, I might've left out some details about that particular situation, but—"

"I don't see any good reason to listen to anything she has to say," George finished, and it was true. With all of the stressful things going on around him, Minx was the *last* person he wanted to see.

Dream ran a nervous hand through his dirty blond locks, ruffling them in a way that made George wonder what they'd feel like in between his own fingers. The Slytherin boy looked conflicted about something.

"Listen," he said with a sigh. "I've been thinking about some things lately."

George raised an eyebrow, silently urging his friend to continue.

"I just...well, you know I have a shit family," Dream stated seriously.

"Uh...yes."

"And I had this thought a couple of nights ago that, well, if it weren't for *you*, I might've turned out...not quite alright, you know? My parents throw that word around, too. Back in Orlando, my grandma used to tell me these messed up stories about how the No-Maj are all uncivilized animals who eat little wizards and witches for breakfast. It's all just... *bad*."

George was so surprised by the admission that his mouth went dry. Dream glanced at him nervously before continuing.

"It's just, you know, that might've been me. Jeez, George, if we hadn't met when I was nine, my life might've turned out so different. And after Minx called you... *that*, I went all crazy and freaked

out on her because I wanted to protect you, you know? I wanted to keep my George all to myself.”

George’s heart sped up at the way the phrase *my George* had fallen so easily from Dream’s lips. Something about the words made him feel like a swarm of Flitterby moths had taken flight in his stomach.

“But that’s the thing,” Dream said, looking at George imploringly, “I can’t keep my George all to myself, because some people don’t *have* a George. If Minx doesn’t have a George, how will she ever learn to get better?”

George sat in silence as he processed everything Dream had said. After several moments of tense silence, Dream nudged him with his elbow.

“Gogi?”

The nickname snapped George out of his thoughts and brought his focus back to the situation at hand.

“Dream,” he began, “I’m sorry your family is shit and I’m beyond happy we met five years ago.”

Dream beamed at the words, and George wished he had his cellphone on him so he could’ve snapped a photo to preserve the moment. Especially because he had a feeling Dream was not going to be smiling for very much longer.

“*But*,” he continued, taking a deep breath, “why does it have to be *my* responsibility to confront a bunch of bigoted racists?”

A beat. Dream’s face fell. “That wasn’t what I—”

“I know you meant what you said to be a compliment. But I didn’t *ask* to be called rude names and put at the center of some large wizard race war. It’s not fair.”

Dream swallowed and leaned forward in his seat. “George, I don’t want anyone to call you rude names. I just think if you gave Minx a chance, she might genuinely become better. I talked to her already and she was pretty apologetic.”

George shook his head. “It’s fine that she’s apologetic, but she *hurt* me, Dream. I don’t want to talk to her.”

“C’mon, Georgie, just hear her out. Please.”

“It’s not my job to ‘hear her out!’” George snapped, growing frustrated. “Dream, I love you, but you are so *dense* sometimes it makes me want to punch a wall. I don’t want to be anyone’s token Muggle-born friend.”

To George’s surprise, Dream was *smirking*.

“What the *hell*, Dream? There was nothing remotely funny about what I just said!”

“You said you love me.”

George felt his cheeks start to burn, but he couldn’t tell if it was due to annoyance or embarrassment.

“Ugh,” he grumbled. “You’re impossible.”

Dream's expression softened and he placed a comforting hand on George's arm. "I'm sorry for what I said about Minx. I didn't want to make you upset."

George deflated under Dream's touch. "I know. I just wish you could see things from my perspective sometimes."

Dream suddenly reached forward and plucked George's goggles from his head. The world shifted immediately, losing its vibrant red and green hues and leaving behind only striking blues. George blinked in surprise at the change.

"Hey!" he tried to snatch his glasses back, but Dream held them smugly out of reach. "Give them back!"

Dream ignored the plea and put the goggles over his own eyes before exaggeratedly scrutinizing his own hands like he was seeing them for the very first time.

"Oh my gosh!" he exclaimed sarcastically. "You're right, George! I'm seeing things from your perspective now and it's amazing!"

"Wow, you're *so* funny, Dream. Has anyone ever told you how funny you are?"

"Is that...oh my gosh, look at the color of this *parchment*!" Dream cried theatrically. "George, it's incredible!"

"Parchment looks the same, you idiot. Give me the glasses back."

Dream hummed in faux-thoughtfulness before shrugging and lifting the glasses off his head. George extended a hand expectantly.

"Well? Give them back."

"You know what? If you want 'em so badly, you're gonna have to catch 'em!"

"What? Dream what are you— *hey!* You're not allowed to run in the library, Dream! Come back here!"

Madame Pince shushed the boys angrily, but Dream was long gone. The sounds of his laughter bounced off the walls and put a smile on George's face in spite of his mild annoyance. Techno's words from days prior suddenly echoed in his mind.

Selwyn's always been problematic.

As he chased his best friend through the halls of the castle, George realized he didn't believe it.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you thank you thank you to everyone who has been leaving comments and continuing to support this fic! This project would be nothing — and I mean NOTHING — without your kind words! I love you guys!

Social media stuffs:

[ken's twitter](#)

[grass' twitter](#)

[ken's tumblr](#)

[grass' tumblr](#)

Chapter Twenty-Three || Year Four

Chapter Summary

The fourth-years continue to face their Boggarts.

Chapter Notes

Hello, friends!

We have another update! Hope you enjoy!

FANART! Please check out:

[this](#) drawing of Gogi overwhelmed by flyers and [this](#) drawing of Gogi's wand by catsyes on Twitter!

[this](#) drawing of our boys being goofy by imapiratematey!

[these](#) absolutely adorable soft drawings of Techno and Wilbur by kayio!

[this](#) drawing of a George and Dream moment by ehtlog!

[this](#) doodle of Wil helping Techno with his Boggart by Toffee on Twitter!

[this](#) drawing of last chapter's dnf library scene by i-like-minecraft-men on Tumblr!

[this](#) POGGERS drawing of a GB80 and Techno moment by Radiocaesium!

I think I (ken) got them all? If I didn't, YELL AT ME IN THE COMMENTS OR ON TWITTER lol

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George and his classmates trickled into their Wednesday afternoon D.A.D.A. class reluctantly. After that very first lesson where half the class faced their worst fears, Professor Travers had mysteriously disappeared for a few weeks. Philza, who'd been assigned as their substitute teacher, hadn't given the fourth-years much information beyond "she's attending to personal matters," which left the students in the dark as to why their professor had been absent from the classroom.

Unfortunately, all good things were destined to come to an end. The students were informed that morning that Professor Travers was back, and everyone was painfully aware that her return meant more torturous Boggart encounters for her pupils.

She grinned as she welcomed her students into her classroom. George hated the way she eagerly waited for everyone to take their seats.

"Alright class," Professor Travers announced once everyone was seated. "I am sorry for my prolonged absence — we have a lot to make up for, now! Since not everyone was able to face their fears last lesson due to a lack of time, we'll be picking up right where we left off."

George groaned. He'd been dreading the moment that he'd have to face the Boggart in front of his peers. Even though he'd spent quite a bit of time over the past two weeks rehearsing the

incantation in his head, he was still incredibly uncomfortable with the whole class knowing his greatest fear.

Deep down, he wasn't even sure what his worst fear *was*.

"George! I believe it was about to be your turn right before the class was dismissed. Why don't you step forward so we can get started?"

Curse Professor Travers and her good memory, George thought to himself as he forced his legs to stand up from his seat. Techno glanced over at him sympathetically as he set his things down and reached into his robes for his wand.

"Hey, listen man, it's really only embarrassin' for as long as you're up there," his roommate muttered reassuringly. "Think of it this way: you're lucky you get to go first cuz everyone else is too busy worryin' about themselves to think about how bad you look up there."

George blinked a few times, unsure how to feel about the remark. "Er, thanks?"

Techno smirked. "Yeah, no problem. 'Sides, at least you're not gonna look like some loser cryin' over a parent you never met, right?" the pink haired boy chuckled wryly.

"R-right," George murmured, averting his eyes. "At least there's *that*."

"Yeah... it's, uh, *Riddikulus*, by the way. You might forget it when you gotta actually *face* the thing, but... don't."

George nodded. Though Techno's attempts at being reassuring weren't entirely successful, they were certainly thoughtful. George could appreciate the effort. "Thanks," he murmured.

"Anytime."

As George made his way to the front of the class, he caught Wilbur shooting Techno a pair of thumbs up. He could hear Wilbur stage-whisper to Techno after his back was turned.

"That was really nice of you, mate! Good on you!"

"It was embarrassin' and if I ever try to do it again I want you to kill me."

Professor Travers tapped her foot impatiently, eyeing George with an unreadable expression. The Boggart within the cupboard began to howl and bang against the sides of its confinement as soon as George approached it, only increasing his dread.

"Now, I trust that you remember the incantation?" asked Professor Travers, her wand hovering over the locks of the cupboard.

George nodded.

"Very good, but just in case you've forgotten, the spell is *Riddikulus*. I wouldn't want someone like you to get hurt just because you're embarrassed to ask. *All* great wizards need help sometimes." She smiled at George before asking, "Are you ready?"

George narrowed his eyes at his professor's words. "Yes. And I'm not embarrassed to ask anything. I know when to ask for help."

"Yes, I'm sure you do. Well, then — three, two, one!"

The doors suddenly flew open. George put on what he hoped was a brave face as he waited for the Boggart to reveal its form.

When it did, George gasped.

Out of the cupboard stepped a tall, imposing figure. The person before George was all at once unfamiliar and unmistakable. His blond hair was a few shades darker than it should have been and appeared to have been slicked back with some sort of gel. He was wearing long, white robes and freshly-polished dress shoes. Clutched tightly in one of his hands was a syringe loaded with liquid crimson, but that wasn't what disturbed George the most about him.

No, the most disturbing thing about the Boggart-person was his gaze. The familiar green eyes that stared into George's own held none of their usual warmth. They were cold and calculating and off puttingly foreign, but George instantly recognized them as belonging to his best friend.

Dream — no, the *Boggart* — looked at George and sneered.

"I thought I took care of you already, *Mudblood*," the Dream lookalike snarled, pinning George in place with its cruel stare. Even though the rational side of his brain was screaming at him that the thing before him wasn't real, that the slur *wasn't real*, George still couldn't help but flinch at the poisonous insult.

Boggart-Dream spat at George's feet and brandished the syringe like a weapon. "Time to give back that magic you stole, *Gogi*. Let's put that filthy blood to good use."

"Y-you're n-not real," George stuttered. "S-stop it."

"Why don't *you* stop walking around with stolen magic flowing through your veins?" the Boggart hissed, taking a menacing step forward. George swallowed nervously and raised his wand.

He'd had enough of this Boggart.

"*Riddikulus!*" George shouted, striking the blond figure in the center of the chest with a beam of bright light.

The Boggart shuddered before its face began to shift. Vivid patches of color sprouted on his cheeks and nose. Each strand of dirty blond hair fell away one by one until all that was left of the once intimidating-looking man was a bald, frowning clown.

The class giggled as Professor Travers opened the cupboard to let the Boggart retreat. George gulped, relaxing his stance once he was certain the thing wasn't coming back.

That had to have been the worst experience of his life. He hoped he'd never have to see a Boggart again.

He turned around and stalked back to his seat, refusing to meet Dream's eye as he sat back down.

"Well, then! Good work, George! What an *impressive* reaction time!" Professor Travers exclaimed, clapping her hands together. George said nothing at the compliment, choosing instead to stare intensely at his lap like it was the most interesting thing in the universe.

Dream was clearly worried for his best friend. "Hey, George? Are you—?" the Slytherin began, placing his hand on George's arm in a comforting gesture. Before he could articulate his concerns, however, he was interrupted by their professor.

"Dream! Why don't you go next? Perhaps Mr. Davidson's Boggart was a sign," she chuckled, beckoning the blond over.

George's stomach twisted uncomfortably at the professor's words.

"N-no, I don't think it was," Dream muttered, clutching his wand in a tight fist before walking up to the cupboard.

George sighed and buried his head in his arms. He was already entirely exhausted by his own Boggart encounter; the last thing he wanted to do was sit through an entire show of fear manifestations for the next hour.

Something hit the side of his head and he opened his eyes, noticing a balled up piece of paper on his desk. He uncrumpled the note and scanned the paper quickly, a tiny smile creeping up his face as he processed the words.

Definitely didn't look like a loser.

He glanced up and shot Techno a grateful look just as the Boggart's cupboard burst open.

His head snapped towards the direction of the sound on instinct. As much as he didn't want to be privy to his best friend's deepest, darkest fears, he couldn't bring himself to look away once his eye caught onto Dream's Boggart.

There, on the floor, was a strange looking creature unlike anything George had ever seen before. Its features were split down the center of its face, a line down the middle separating its features into distinct black and white halves. It had long, lanky arms that were wrapped tightly around its knees, hugging them to its chest.

The creature blinked its eyes open and tilted its head at Dream, directing its heterochromatic green and red stare at the wand in the young wizard's hand.

"Who are you?" the creature asked, its voice sounding strangely human. If George closed his eyes, the thing almost sounded like a young boy instead of the bicolored abomination that it was. "Are you here to inject me again?" it wondered, voice wavering, almost as though it was scared of the answer but had already resigned itself to its fate.

"N-no— I-I'm not like those people," Dream stammered, lowering his wand. "I wouldn't do that to you."

"It's okay. I wouldn't remember you if you did, anyway," the creature smiled sadly. It looked like it wanted to cry.

What — no, who — is this thing?

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Randolph," Dream whispered, his voice coming out choked and quiet. His arm was shaky as he raised his wand up and pointed it at the creature.

The Boggart suddenly twitched. The entire class watched with curiosity as the image of the black and white creature began to glitch like a scratched disc. Tufts of black and white hair morphed before George's very eyes, slowly but surely turning a dark brown color. Mismatched eyes blinked closed, and when they once again opened they were staring up at Dream through a familiar pair of white glasses.

George tensed at the new image sitting in front of Dream. It felt strange to behold his own body,

now in the same curled up position 'Randolph' had been in before. The Boggart-George's gaze was fixed on the wand in Dream's hand.

"Who are you?" George's lookalike asked in George's voice. Dream stood frozen in shock, every one of his muscles tensed. "A-are you here to inject me?"

"No! No! I didn't do that! It wasn't me! It wasn't my fault!" Dream yelled, both hands now clasped tightly around his wand. "I never—!"

"Dream, the incantation is *Riddikulus*," Professor Travers called to her student from her position beside the cupboard.

"*Riddikulus!*" Dream shouted desperately, his wand sputtering pathetically as the spell failed to cast, "*Riddikulus, riddikulus, RIDDIKULUS!*"

"Is this... my termination?" The Boggart began to tremble. "I-I'm sorry I failed."

"*NO!*" Dream wailed, sinking to his knees.

"*Riddikulus!*" Professor Travers shouted, confidently leaping in front of the Boggart and putting an end to the miserable encounter. Dream was so lost in his own mind that he didn't seem to notice the creature was gone.

"I'm so sorry, I'm so so sorry," he muttered, repeating the words over and over like a mantra. His green eyes were glazed over.

"Now now, let's not get all down on ourselves," Professor Travers tutted, locking the Boggart back up in its cupboard before crouching and placing a hand on Dream's shoulder. "Do you think you'd like to visit the infirmary, Dream?"

"N-no, I— I'm s-sorry," he choked out, his whole body shaking as Professor Travers helped him to his feet.

"Nonsense, dear, no need to apologize. Are you *certain* you're well enough to stay? Perhaps I should call Mr. Watson. He'd be happy to take you down to Madame Abbott if you don't think you can make it there by yourself."

"N-no, I just— I'm not— I didn't do that to them!" he sobbed, burying his face in his hands.

"Of course you didn't," Professor Travers sighed, rubbing comforting circles onto Dream's back.

"Maybe you'd like a drink? Some water would be good for you, I think. Let's get you some water."

George closed his eyes and took a deep breath in. He had a million questions racing through his mind.

Who is Randolph? Why didn't either of the Boggart versions of us remember Dream? What injections were we talking about? Do they have anything to do with Dream's dad? Curled up on the floor like that, Randolph and I looked almost like...test subjects.

The thought sent a jolt of unease down George's spine, but there was one particular word that had struck him as particularly disturbing.

What did I mean when I said 'termination'?

The chair beside George creaked, pushing away the frightening thoughts before they could get any

worse. He chanced a look over to where Dream had taken his seat. His best friend's eyes were wet and puffy, his cheeks a splotchy red.

George had the urge to reach out and comfort him. He wanted to say something, to make Dream smile again, but he didn't have the faintest clue as to what Dream needed to hear.

Perhaps what Dream needed was some space. The absolute last thing George wanted to do was accidentally say something insensitive and cause Dream to dissolve into a blubbing mess all over again.

Instead of trying to comfort him, George turned to face the front of the class again and resigned himself to watching apathetically as the rest of his classmates went up to face their fears.

More students stepped up to the cupboard. Some girl had to confront an Inferius; a different Ravenclaw boy was forced to watch his own mother bleed out on the floor. The exercise was teaching George a lot about his classmates and their values in life. The roommate Dream always complained about appeared to be scared of Leprechauns, for some reason, and a few of his Housemates rolled their eyes and muttered things about disappearing money under their breaths. Eventually, their teacher called out a name that had George's ears perking up involuntarily.

"Miss Minx! Let's have you come up next!" Professor Travers called out, beckoning for the Slytherin girl to make her way towards the front of the room.

George hadn't heard anything from the girl since summer, when Dream went to confront her and got himself kicked where it hurt. Even though Dream had, for some reason, told him to hear her out the other day, she hadn't made any attempts to reach out to him.

Although he couldn't care less if she still wanted to apologize, he *was* grateful that she'd stopped harassing him with her attempts. George meant it when he'd told Dream that he didn't owe Minx anything. If his refusal to speak with her meant that she'd given up on making amends for good, so be it.

Minx rose from her desk with a sigh and dragged her feet over to the cupboard. She looked awful, George realized, but not in an *ugly* way. Just in a tired way. Like she hadn't had a good night's sleep in over a year.

"I'm ready, just let the f— let the thing out already," she grumbled, cutting herself off before she could swear at their professor.

Professor Travers grinned in spite of her student's lack of enthusiasm. "Alright, looks like we're quite eager to face our fears today, aren't we? Very brave!" she said. A moment later, she flicked her wand and the cupboard door swung open.

A tall, pink haired girl stepped out, a wicked grin plastered onto her face and her arms folded across her chest haughtily. Though George had never seen the girl before, she somehow looked familiar to him.

"Good on ye, Justine!" the girl gleefully exclaimed. "Our little blood traitor's finally done thinkin she's all high n fuckin mighty! Glad to have ye back!"

Minx rolled her eyes, readying her wand in front of her.

"Mum and I are so happy ye stopped bein' a bitch and *finally* joined the cause. Don't let anyone know that I told ye this," the Boggart-girl leaned in and whispered conspiratorially, "but I overheard Dad say he's so proud o' ye that he's gonna buy ye a big birthday gift this year! What

d'ye think it might be, Justine? Personally, *I* think—”

"*Riddikulus!*" Minx spat, her wand casting a blinding light which hit the Boggart in its face, causing the creature to transform into the shape of a large cow with a bright pink wig. "Fuckin' cow."

Schlatt let out a cackle from the other side of the room as Minx kicked the cow into the cupboard, trapping the creature on her own before Professor Travers could assist.

"And stay in there, ye fuckin bitch!" the Slytherin girl shouted, giving the wooden door a punch for good measure before turning on her heel and making her way back to her seat.

George followed her with his eyes as she stomped over to her desk. The entire class was too busy giggling to notice the way she swiped at her eyes with the sleeves of her robe. Their professor looked surprised by Minx's reaction.

"Erm, very well done, Miss Minx," she remarked, looking both impressed and irritated by her student's performance, "but perhaps you can refrain from using such language in my classroom in the future."

"Yes ma'am," Minx replied curtly.

"Uh...well, then. Very good. Now, it seems like there's only one person left who hasn't gone up yet —"

"Yeah, yeah, I know, here I am." Schlatt sighed, marching up to the front of the classroom before his name could be read out. The professor smiled encouragingly as she waited for the boy to approach the closet.

"Wonderful, Mr. Schlatt! As soon as you're finished, class can be dismissed," Professor Travers said, lifting her wand, "Are you ready?"

"As I'll ever be." Schlatt shrugged.

The cupboard creaked and groaned as the Boggart inside struggled against its restraints. With a flick of Professor Travers' wand, the door clicked open and a hush fell over the classroom.

A familiar figure, straight off the front page of the Daily Prophet, stepped out of the cupboard and appraised the class with a sharp eye.

"Hey, Boss." Schlatt grinned nervously, wagging his wand in front of his face. "Sorry I gotta do this to ya."

Selwyn glared at the boy in front of him. "You're not going to do a thing."

"Alright, well— *Riddikulus!*" A crackle of light spluttered out of the tip of Schlatt's wand, but the Boggart remained unscathed. "Aw, shit."

Selwyn raised an unimpressed eyebrow at the sight before him. "How pathetic."

"Yeah, yeah, hold on," Schlatt huffed, slapping the bottom of his wand with the heel of his hand, "Gimme a second—"

"Stop this ridiculous nonsense right this instant." Boggart-Selwyn demanded.

The hand holding Schlatt's wand suddenly went slack and Schlatt stared down at his magical

instrument like it had personally betrayed him. "Are you kiddin' me? That's not good."

"Do you know what's been 'not good' lately?" Selwyn asked, clasping his hands behind his back.

Schlatt gulped and turned to face their professor. "Hey, Teach? I don't think I can do this."

"Nonsense! The incantation is *Riddikulus* —"

"I *know* what it is! I tried it five seconds ago! It didn't work!" Schlatt spat.

"Your *work*, as of late, has been mediocre at best." Selwyn continued, "Do you honestly think that I'll continue to let you stay if you prove to be anything other than useful to me?"

"Professor, I *really* think you should get rid of this thing," Schlatt said, his voice taking on a panicked tone.

"You've been nothing but an inconvenience to me since the day I let you into my home. I tried to give you an opportunity to prove yourself, I gave you many, *many* chances, Jebediah." Selwyn paused to stare Schlatt right in the eyes. "I see now why your parents couldn't stand to keep you around."

George sensed Dream tensing beside him. This was *not* something meant for the class to hear.

"Professor, can ye f— can ye get that thin' outta here already?!" Minx shouted from the back of the classroom.

"I believe it's high time that you made yourself scarce, Jebediah. Gather your things. You are no longer welcome here."

Without a word, Schlatt turned around and began to walk back towards his desk.

"*Riddikulus*!" Professor Travers called, sealing the Boggart back into its cupboard before turning back to face Schlatt. "Really now, what was the matter with you?" she huffed irritably.

The Slytherin looked back at the professor over his shoulder as he collected his things from his desk. "Couldn't do it, sorry."

"You gave up after hardly trying!"

"Listen, Professor, just cuz I didn't break down cryin' doesn't mean that thing didn't affect me, alright? I couldn't do it. That's it," Schlatt huffed.

The bell rang just as Professor Travers opened her mouth to shoot back a retort. She sighed and shook her head. "You're all dismissed."

"Thank fucking god," Dream muttered.

George couldn't agree more.

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Dream *really* didn't feel like doing all the stupid Arithmancy homework Professor Vector had

assigned their class. Their earlier D.A.D.A. lesson was still plaguing his thoughts and making it hard to concentrate on anything other than fear after fear after fear.

He sighed and slammed his textbook shut, grateful that he was the only one in his dorm room. There was no *way* he was going to get anything done with so many horrific Boggart images invading his mind. Besides, it wasn't like the homework was due the very next day or anything. Dream had only started the assignment in the first place because George's nerdy habits of finishing everything early were starting to rub off on him.

He pushed his chair back and dragged his feet over to his bed, plummeting face-first onto the mattress with a groan.

His brain wouldn't stop torturing him. Every time he closed his eyes, he was greeted with the image of an eleven-year-old Randolph Boo curled up in his containment cell. If he weren't so afraid of having nightmares, he would have flipped himself over and fallen asleep to escape his own thoughts, but he just couldn't risk taking a nap and seeing the Ender-boy in his cell again.

Or worse: seeing George there, instead.

*George, George, George.*

George was scared of him. Really, Dream should have known that his best friend's fear wasn't going to be something shallow like spiders or vampires, but he'd still been surprised to see *himself* emerge from that closet. Granted, it had been an older, nastier version of himself, but the Boggart's voice had been unmistakably *his*.

It was *his* voice that called George that vile word. It was *his* voice that told George he didn't deserve the magic with which he'd been born.

George's Boggart had made Dream sick.

His peace was disturbed when the door to his dorm room burst open abruptly and one of his roommates unceremoniously barged in with a groan.

"Boy am I *exhausted*," Schlatt huffed from the other side of the room. Dream could hear the sounds of the other boy shrugging off his school robes and kicking off his shoes.

"Where were you?" Dream asked without turning his head. Schlatt finally plopped down onto his bed and let out a sigh.

"Hanging out with Quackity. You know, the usual."

Dream hummed and glanced at Schlatt out of the corner of his eye. His roommate was sprawled out on his bed, limbs starfished across the green comforter. The sight reminded Dream of all the times he'd woken up and seen the other Slytherin in the exact same position in their room at the Selwyn Residence.

"I know you're staring at me, Dreamie."

Dream sat up and turned his body to face his roommate's bed fully.

"Yeah," he admitted, shrugging, "I guess I was just wondering about the Boggart stuff from earlier."

Schlatt tensed almost imperceptibly, but his expression remained neutral. "Hmm."



Dream hesitated before asking his next question, aware that it had the potential to overstep a boundary.

“Hey,” he began, “what was up with your Boggart? You’re usually pretty good at D.A.D.A., so why couldn’t you...” Dream trailed off, but Schlatt understood the question. The other Slytherin turned his head and levelled Dream with a glare.

“Why couldn’t I deal with it?”

“Well...yeah.”

A sigh through gritted teeth. “My curse didn’t let me. I physically *couldn’t* cast the incantation.”

Dream’s face scrunched up in confusion. “But it was just a Boggart. It wasn’t even a real member of my family.”

Schlatt shrugged. “Boggarts take on some of the magical abilities of the thing they morph into. I guess my curse decided to screw me over in front of everyone.” After a moment’s pause, he added, “It’s getting stronger, Dream-boat. I can *feel* it.”

“Stronger how?”

The words tumbled from Schlatt’s lips automatically. “It’s not just about not lying to you guys anymore. I can’t...if I want to insult you to your face, it’s like an invisible hand reaches up and starts to choke me. Forget about trying to hurt you or anything. I probably wouldn’t be able to hex you even if my life depended on it.”

The statement had so many implications that Dream was momentarily stunned into silence. Schlatt’s mouth was set in a thin line.

“I’m sorry,” Dream said awkwardly, itching to break the silence. Once again, Schlatt didn’t react.

“It’s whatever,” he replied. “The Hogwarts rumor mill is gonna have a field day with all our deepest, darkest secrets.”

Dream chuckled humorlessly and turned to stare out his window. “Mine’ll probably confuse them too much. ‘Hey, did you see that weird monster-child that appeared in front of Selwyn? What *was* that?’” he mocked in a high-pitched voice, imitating some of their annoyingly gossipy classmates.

A strangled sound came from the other side of the room. Alarmed, Dream looked back at Schlatt and saw that the boy’s face was beet red, as if he were struggling to breathe.

“Schlatt?” Dream questioned, a note of panic in his voice. Just when Dream was about to frantically call for a prefect, his roommate released a deep breath and launched into a jumbled explanation.

“The creature in Clay Selwyn’s Boggart was W.A.P. test subject number zero-zero-zero-two-nine from Enderman Study Number Three, a member of the human species who suffered from the squib affliction. His name was Randolph Maibeloffed Boo, aged eleven years.”

Schlatt rolled over onto his stomach and dry heaved once he was done with his spiel. Dream stared in shock as the other boy coughed and spluttered for a full minute before flopping onto his back and fixing his eyes on the ceiling.

“Can’t even ignore a goddamn rhetorical question,” Schlatt grumbled.

Dream's jaw dropped. "That was because I—?"

"Yep."

A beat. Dream's eyes narrowed. "Wait, you knew about Randolph?"

"Yes, Sir."

"How?" Dream asked, voice rising in volume. "Why didn't you *say* anything to me?"

"I met Ranboo the day he arrived in Caerphilly. Your dad brought him back from the States with a bunch of other squib kids," Schlatt answered. "I didn't tell you because I didn't see a reason for you to know."

"Wait, Ranboo? I thought his name was Randolph."

"It was. But the last part of his name was smudged on the paper that Selwyn showed me, so I thought his name was 'Ran Boo.' It stuck."

Dream's head spun with the new information. "My dad brought squibs back with him from his business trips?"

Schlatt grimaced. "Please, Dream, stop *asking* me these— ah, fuck. Yeah, it's easier to get 'em from America. Ma.C.U.S.A. doesn't give a shit about transporting kids out as long as the Statute of Secrecy is upheld."

"Wow," Dream breathed. "I didn't think...I thought..." after a brief pause, he looked down at his hands and quietly asked, "Did you talk to him at all? Wh-what was he like?"

"Why do you wanna know about this kid so much? Yeah, I talked to him. I gave him meals a few times. The kid asked me if this meant he'd be able to go to magic school, and, well...we both know how that turned out."

*Terminated. Terminated. Terminated.*

"Did you—"

"Dream. Every time you ask me a question, my goddamn throat feels like it's fucking on *fire*. Please, please stop. Please."

Reluctantly, Dream nodded and lay back down on his bed. As much as he selfishly wanted to continue asking questions, he didn't want to cause Schlatt any more pain.

He wondered if Ranboo had known what his fate was going to be before it happened, or if his termination came as a nightmarish surprise. Dream hoped it had been quick. He'd never seen a person die before, but he knew the logistics; he knew that there were a myriad of ways to kill someone, only one of which was supposedly instant and painless. Just two words, a flick of a wand, a flash of green light—

Dream hoped that Ranboo hadn't suffered.

*But he had*, the voice in the back of his head supplied. *He was in pain. He was confused. He was only eleven years old...*

It was difficult for Dream to go about the rest of his day after that conversation. When he finally fell asleep later that night, Ranboo visited him in his dreams.

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George was sitting at the Ravenclaw table in the Great Hall one morning with his roommates when a scream sounded from the hallway.

“Heh?” Technoblade said, turning his head sharply towards the hall’s entrance. “What was—”

“SAMMY! GET DOWN FROM THERE, YOU LITTLE MUFFINHEAD!”

Everyone watched as a boy with big sunglasses sharply veered around the corner and burst into the Great Hall riding a broomstick that looked too large for his body. George recognized the child as Sammy, the quidditch-obsessed Hufflepuff second-year who he’d met in the library at the start of the academic year.

From the Gryffindor table, Sappnap burst out laughing.

“How’s it going, Bad?” the third-year shouted across the room, staring at the Hufflepuff prefect who was hopelessly chasing after the airborne student. Bad shot the Gryffindor a glare.

“Not great, at the moment. We had a bit of an incident and— *SAMUEL GREEN*, GET DOWN HERE THIS INSTANT OR I WILL REVOKE YOUR QUIDDITCH PRIVILEGES!”

The young boy executed an impressive loop-the-loop with only one hand gripping his broom handle. The spectating students all cheered at the manoeuvre while nearby professors watched the spectacle in shock.

“Well, this is quite interesting,” Eret remarked, taking a bite out of his buttered toast. “Quidditch practice is usually restricted to the pitch.”

All George could do was nod at his roommate’s comment. His eyes were fixed on the child still executing daring training exercises above their heads.

“Did you paint your nails, Eret?” Wilbur asked, leaning in to inspect the boy’s hands. “That’s a lovely colour.”

“I’m glad you like them! I used the *Illicetto* charm to make them shimmer. It took several tries, but I’m quite happy with the way they turned out.”

“Yes, the light blue matches your eyes beautifully! Techno, doesn’t he look great?”

Techno shrugged noncommittally. “Yeah, I guess.”

George’s roommates had to raise their voices as the commotion above their heads increased in volume. Several teachers had begun to shout threats at the flying Hufflepuff boy, who was at this point dangling from his broom with one arm.

“Hey, Wilbur, could you say that sentence again?”

“Fishing for compliments, are we, Eret?”

Eret smiled. “Maybe. Could you repeat it, though? I want to see something.”

The Great Hall whooped and cheered as yet *another* second-year burst in on a broomstick. A Gryffindor girl wearing red practice robes grinned triumphantly and steered her broom until she and Sammy were facing each other in midair.

“Alright, I’ll play along. ‘Techno, doesn’t he look great?’”

Eret smiled, completely ignoring the craziness around them. “Now could you try saying the same sentence, but this time using *they* instead of *he*?”

“Oh, okay. ‘Techno, don’t they look great?’” Wilbur complied.

“I quite like that, actually! Would it be alright if you referred to me using those pronouns for a bit?”

“Yeah, sure, I don’t see why not. Hey, Gogi, Eret wants us to use different pronouns, so we should start saying—”

“Are you guys just unbothered by the two children doing somersaults above your heads?” George exclaimed in disbelief. Wilbur and Eret blinked at each other, then slowly looked up.

“I guess they *are* causing quite a fuss now, aren’t they?” Eret commented. “Wait, there are *three* children up there now.”

George looked up. Sure enough, a third child had joined the two quidditch players in the air.

“Oh, bless his heart,” Wilbur said, “he’s tiny. Is he a first-year?”

Eret squinted at the child in question. “Looks like it. But first-years aren’t allowed to have their own brooms, so what is he—?”

Eret cut themselves off as the Gryffindor girl began to shout at the small child. To make it easier to overhear the children’s conversation, they pulled out their wand and cast a quick eavesdropping charm.

“Okay, Purpled, if you wanna get on your quidditch team next year, you have to start taking your training seriously!” the Gryffindor girl declared loudly. “Eighty is *definitely* gonna be your team’s captain next year, and he’s not gonna take any noobs!”

Across the Ravenclaw table, Technoblade rolled his eyes. “As if Eighty’s gonna be captain. The man’s late to every game.”

"Shut up, Astelic, I'm already better than you!" The first-year shot back, looping over the girl’s head as if to prove his point. "Plus, Gémure-Boye's an old man. He's like *fifteen* which is close to *twenty* and if you add a zero to the end of *that*, that's *two hundred*! I'm not gonna work hard to impress a grandpa!"

“Just because you’re better than Astelic doesn’t mean you’re good!” Sammy yelled. “In Gryffindor, all you have to do is scream the loudest during tryouts and you get a spot on the team! Shouting is their only distracting strategy during games.”

"*Hey!* That's not — okay, maybe the second part is a little true, but I'm a good player!" Astelic insisted.

Purpled shrugged, "Well, we're about to find out— owls incoming!"

The second-years flinched on their brooms, snapping their heads in the direction of the giant open window in the hall.

"Ha! *Wow*, are you sure you guys should be training me?" Purpled scoffed, flying in slow circles with his hands behind his head. "Can't believe you guys fell for that."

"Shut up! That doesn't count!" Sammy spluttered, pushing his sunglasses up indignantly.

"Yeah, that prank sucked. That would never work in a real game," Astelic huffed. "Besides, the owls *should* be incoming soon, so remember to *pretend they're bludgers* and *dodge*."

"*I know*, we went over it like *a billion times*," Purpled replied, rolling his eyes. "Oh, *now* they're incoming"

Sammy chuckled, "We're not falling for that ag— woah!" An owl whizzed past the second year's head, interrupting him mid-sentence. "Okay, never mind, it *is* real this time!"

Eret snorted. "Their quidditch training methods seem quite unconventional. Techno, have you ever heard of anything this ridiculous?" When the pink haired boy didn't respond, Eret looked around. "Wait, where's Techno?"

George looked at the place across the table where his pink haired friend had been sitting seconds prior only to find the seat empty. Puzzled by Techno's absence, the three remaining Ravenclaw roommates looked around the Great Hall in confusion.

"How did he vanish like that? A Disillusionment charm?" Eret wondered.

As if to answer the query, the three suddenly heard a familiar monotone voice speak up over the sounds of the other students and staff.

"Your form is terrible, Astelic. Sammy, what's the point of comin' in here and makin' a scene if you're not even gonna do the barrel roll correctly? Gryffindor and Hufflepuff won't stand a chance if you two keep playin' like *nerds*."

When George finally pinpointed the location of his roommate, he saw that Techno had summoned his own broom and was hovering in the air several meters away from the three airborne children who had begun to dodge arriving owls. A crowd of Hogwarts staff had assembled beneath the quidditch players to observe the spectacle. George winced when he saw that Filch was present and looked ready to eat the students alive.

"Excuse me! Mr. Green, Miss Astelic, Mr. Purpled, and Mr. Technoblade! Descend *right now*!" Headmistress McGonagall demanded, her expression furious. Only Technoblade complied, lowering himself to the floor with what George assumed was a muttered apology. Sammy, Astelic, and Purpled, however, remained airborne.

"One second, Headmistress! We're practicing!" Astelic yelled as she narrowly avoided a large gray bird. "Hey, Purpled, watch out!"

The blond first-year let out a scream when a familiar barn owl launched itself at his head and dug its talons into his hair. "What the hell is wrong with this owl!"

The owl screeched viciously in response and flapped its wings in his face, seeming adamant on committing this murder.

"Oh my *god*, that doesn't help me!" Purpled screamed back, wrenching his broomstick downward

to get away from the owl, "I hate the British! Even British *owls* suck!"

The crowd gasped and cleared an area as the first year plummeted towards the ground, yanking himself upward at the last second in an attempt to out-maneuver the owl.

"Can you guys stop cheering and *shoot this thing down?!* " Purpled shrieked over the applause of the students as he turned to find that the owl was still hot on his trail.

George hardly needed the aid of Eret's eavesdropping charm to hear a familiar Gryffindor voice shout, "We don't do that shit here, you fuckin American *bitch!* "

"I didn't mean with Muggle weapons, you dense british fu— *ow!*" A well aimed peck to the forehead caused the distracted child to lose his balance, eliciting gasps from onlookers. George watched with bated breath as the Slytherin boy's grip on his broomstick gave out, sending him falling to the floor.

That fall could kill him, George's brain registered numbly. Thankfully, McGonagall had her wand out at the ready.

"*Arresto Momentum!*" she shouted, sharply flicking her wrist in the boy's direction. Immediately, the child's fall was slowed until he was gracefully floating downwards instead of hurtling towards his demise. Everyone in the Great Hall breathed a collective sigh of relief when he landed safely in Hagrid's outstretched arms.

Shortly after the first-year's rescue, Sammy and Astelic reluctantly dismounted their brooms and followed a furious McGonagall out of the hall. Filch trailed closely behind, an eager look on his usually scowling face. As this was happening, the owl that had attacked the boy perched on Wilbur's shoulder and dropped a rolled up newspaper in his lap, hooting pleasantly when the Ravenclaw reached up to scratch its head.

"Friend, what did we say about attacking blonds?" Wilbur tutted, softly rebuking the bird. "We only attack one *specific* blond now, remember?"

"Yeah, Friend, I thought I trained you better than that," Techno chimed in, sliding back into his seat at the breakfast table like nothing happened. George and Eret stared at the quidditch player disbelievingly.

"How are *you* not being escorted to detention?" George asked. "You were up there, too!"

Technoblade shrugged and began to nonchalantly butter a piece of toast. "As St. Hedwig herself once said: 'In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity'. As long as I'm not the one causin' the *biggest* of the problems, I can cause small ones in between."

Sapnap walked up to their table, then, Quackity and Skeppy following closely behind him.

"That was *nuts!*" Sapnap exclaimed. "Astelic is such a little badass. I feel kinda bad for them, though, cause Filch is gonna tear them to shreds in his office."

Skeppy nudged the bandana-clad boy and smirked. "We can always try to bust them out. I know where Bad keeps his set of prefect keys."

"Dude, you're a genius!"

Quackity suddenly leaned forward and clapped Technoblade on the back. "Yooooo Techno!" he said, "I saw your mom in the newspaper again, and she is spicy! Like, *damn!*"

“Ewww, dude, *stop*,” Sapnap admonished, whacking the other Gryffindor on the head. “You don’t just say that about someone’s mom.”

Quackity threw his hands up. “Hey, Sapnap, that’s *fucked up*, man. I didn’t mean it like that, I *respect* women. We respect women in Mexican Gryffindor, man.”

George raised an eyebrow. “Mexican Gryffindor?”

“Don’t get him started, please,” Sapnap said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Wilbur unrolled his copy of the newspaper in question and scanned the front cover. “Oh, wow, Techno, Claire’s on the cover!”

Technoblade shrugged and took a sip from his goblet. “Yep.”

Before Quackity could lean over and comment on the photograph, Sapnap hauled him away from the Ravenclaw table by the arm. “We’re off to liberate some quidditch kids — see ya!” he threw over his shoulder as he dragged his friend toward the Great Hall’s entrance.

Eret let out a breath and nodded towards the copy of the *Daily Prophet*. “What’s it say today?”

“*Claire Technoblade calls for transparency, urges W.A.P. to publish all publicly funded research*,” Wilbur read. His eyes continued to skim the article. “She has a point. Without the research being made publicly available, it *does* seem like blatant discrimination to only ask Muggle-borns for blood samples.”

“It’s discrimination even *without* the research,” Techno quickly pointed out. “I don’t care if my blood holds the key to curin’ world hunger — it’s *my blood*, and no one has a right to take it from me.”

Techno said the words with so much conviction that it left no room for discussion after that. The four roommates finished up their breakfasts, the mood much more serious than it had been before. As George went about the rest of his day, he couldn’t help but wonder if Techno was right.

If my blood has the power to help people, do I have an obligation to offer it?

Then he thought about the W.A.P. posters around Hogsmeade. Then he thought about the way some people talked about squibness as if life without magic was a fate worse than death. Then he thought about his parents at home living their normal, Muggle lives, and he dismissed his doubts.

His blood was his and his alone.

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Minx didn't have any high expectations for her birthday that year. Actually, she didn't have any expectations at *all*, but even that low bar didn't stop the day from completely sucking arse.

It was funny, how things could change so dramatically in a year. Her last birthday was spent among friends, all congratulating her and giving her gifts and shoving cake in her face. Now she was hiding away in the library with a textbook as thick as her arm to try to distract herself from just how *lonely* she felt.

Sure, Schlatt had remembered, but his idea of a birthday celebration was trying to feed her a Puking Pastille before breakfast. As *if* the food at the Slytherin table didn't make her sick enough already.

Selwyn had remembered, too, which was... weird. Ever since he'd apologized to her, Minx had felt like they'd developed some sort of civil relationship. She wouldn't dare call him her friend — Merlin, no — but she knew she'd struck a chord with him when he came to confront her. Even if she never got to make up with George, she was glad she'd at least gotten the chance to kick a bit of sense into his hypocrite of a best friend.

Honestly, it was probably childish of her to care about something as trivial as her birthday when there was much more important shit happening around her, but Minx couldn't help but feel sorry for herself. She'd grown tired of all the stupid consequences that had come with her one idiotic mistake. *Surely* she didn't deserve to feel miserable for the rest of her life. *Surely* she deserved at least one day to feel nice, just *one* day where she didn't have to feel like shit about having ruined all her friendships.

A wet drop hit the back of her hand, followed by another. Before she knew it, tears were flowing freely down her face.

Her body shuddered in a silent sob, the kind that didn't bother anyone around her and made her feel like she couldn't breathe. She'd been crying like that a lot. She cried in a way that shielded her from the mocking glares of her peers and kept her shame a secret.

She tensed when she heard a floorboard creak behind her and quickly rushed to wipe her eyes before the intruder noticed her crying.

"O-oh! Sorry, I didn't realize anyone was here," a soft voice apologized. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

"S fine." Minx muttered, flipping a page in the textbook in hopes that the stranger would leave.

An uncomfortable silence stretched between the two before Minx huffed and turned to face the new person. "Well, are ye just gonna stand there or are ye—" the bitter remark got caught in Minx's throat as she took in the sight of the girl before her.

Pretty blue eyes appraised her innocently from behind long lashes. The girl smiled brightly when Minx met her gaze. "I knew you were familiar!" she remarked cheerfully. "You're Wilbur's friend! Minx! I'm not sure if you remember me, but my name is Niki. I sat at the lunch table with everyone a few times last year."

"Y-yeah, I remember you..." Minx stuttered out, because *of course* Minx remembered Niki. How could she forget her? The girl was, for one, *fucking gorgeous*. She was also probably the closest thing on earth to a literal angel. Every single word Minx had ever heard the girl say had been cavity-inducingly sweet.

Unfortunately, Niki probably didn't think much of Minx. Trying to leave a good impression on her had been an uphill battle thanks to Schlatt, so Minx wasn't quite sure if it was a good thing that Niki remembered her.

"I'm glad! Do you mind if I sit here with you? I kind of need a break from..." she gestured around vaguely with her hand, before dropping it and chuckling sheepishly, "...everything."

Minx looked up at her with a raised eyebrow. "Are ye sure you wanna be around me?"

"Why wouldn't I?"



Minx gulped. Why did *she* have to be the one to break the news to her? At least she got to exchange two sentences with a kind human being before having to send her running.

"Because I'm a terrible person?" she finally said. "Ye *do* know I'm not even Wilbur's friend anymore, right?"

Niki's smile fell at the comment. "What do you mean?"

Minx sighed. "I fucked up really bad last year, and I pretty much destroyed any chance I had of having good, meaningful friendships anymore. The whole school knows that I'm a piece of shit, except you I guess, but now ye do, too, so ye don't have to stick around anymore."

Another wave of silence fell between the two girls. Minx wished that Niki would just pick up her things and *leave* so she could continue to wallow in her own disappointment.

All she ever did was let people down, over and over again. She let down George. She let down her old Ravenclaw friends. She let down her parents, she let down her *siblings*, and now she was letting down one of the nicest people on the planet.

The chair beside Minx creaked as Niki took a seat. Minx suddenly felt soft fingers gently grasp her own. When she looked up at the Hufflepuff girl, she saw a small smile on her lips.

"I don't think you're a bad person," Niki said in her adorable German lilt.

Minx looked away and snorted. "You don't even know what I did."

There was a slight shuffling as the Hufflepuff girl reached into her robe and offered Minx a tissue. Minx hadn't even realized that she'd started crying again.

"I think that whatever you did, you're really sorry about it. I don't think bad people care about being bad. And they might know they're bad, they might not, but they always think they're entitled to something." She squeezed Minx's hand tightly to emphasize her point. "You're not like that."

"I called my ex-boyfriend a slur," she blurted out, refusing to meet Niki's eye.

"That's...not a good thing."

Minx felt her heart sink.

"But I still don't think you're a bad person."

"I—" she choked on the words, trying to swallow down the giant lump in her throat, "I-I attacked a buncha my classmates in-in my first year. I-I had a hit list n' everything."

The confession sat heavy in the air around them. Minx realized that it was the first time she'd ever admitted her past actions out loud to anyone. It felt like a huge load had been lifted off her shoulders only to immediately be replaced with another, much heavier one as she awaited Niki's response.

"Did you want to?" Niki finally asked, her voice soothingly calm.

"A-at first." Minx admitted, feeling Niki's hand tense atop hers. "I thought I could do it to— to help my siblings. I thought they'd be miserable if I didn't. I thought my family would be proud of me... but then I changed my mind. I didn't want to hurt people anymore, and I thought there had to be a better way but— but my sister said there wasn't. And when I said we should at least *try*, she

and my mum—"

The tears wouldn't stop flowing, her sobs turning from quiet to violent, shaking her entire body with the force. She hadn't realized how much she had been holding in until it all came spewing out.

Niki let her hand go and opened her arms in an invitation, allowing Minx to collapse into them as she continued crying.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I shouldn't have dumped all this on you, it's not fair to you, I'm sorry," Minx spluttered.

"Shh, it's okay. I was the one who asked you. If I couldn't handle it, I wouldn't have asked," she assured her, rocking her back and forth soothingly. "And I *still* don't think you're a bad person. I think you're a good person who's trying her hardest. I think you did some bad stuff, but that doesn't erase all of the good you've done in your life. Can you tell me some good things you've done?"

Minx took a stuttering breath in. What *good* had she done? She'd been so stuck on all the bad that she wasn't even sure if she *had* done any good. "I-I... I helped pay for m-my half on a date when my e-ex didn't have enough money."

"That's good," Niki said encouragingly. "Can you tell me another thing?"

Minx nodded, thoughts of Selwyn appearing in her mind. "I-I listened when someone I *r-really didn't like* ap-pologized to me the other day."

"That's *really* good!" She could practically *hear* Niki's smile. "That's a hard thing to do! How did it go after?"

Minx leaned further into Niki's embrace. "It was... good." She felt a small smile creep onto her face and continued, "He was one of the only two people to tell me happy birthday today."

"Today's your birthday?!" Niki exclaimed, pulling away from the hug to stare Minx in the eyes.

Suddenly feeling very cold without Niki's warmth, Minx could only bring herself to nod as the Hufflepuff's smile grew impossibly brighter.

"It's my birthday, too!" she cried.

"It-it is?"

"Yes!" She nodded, "Oh, wait! Wait right here! I'll be right back! Just— one second!"

Before Minx could even process what had happened, the girl disappeared and she was once again left alone in the library.

She sniffled quietly to herself, shutting the textbook in front of her and pushing it to the side. *That* piece of shit hadn't done a thing except make her head hurt.

The realization of what she had just confessed to Niki suddenly hit Minx full force and a wave of regret rolled over her. *I just told a girl I barely fuckin know all the worst things I've done. I've fuckin lost it. What the fuck is wrong with me?!*

A pit of dizzying nausea buried itself in her stomach and she wasn't sure whether she was going to throw up or cry again. She'd thoroughly humiliated herself and had no way of taking back any of it.

A gross little part of Minx's brain told her that if she ran now, she could save herself from any

further embarrassment. Sure, Niki would be upset, but she could just avoid the Hufflepuff girl for the rest of her life and be done with everything. Besides, she was already a terrible person — Niki *knew* that — so it wasn't like the younger girl would be *surprised*...

*No.*

That little voice in her brain was an arsehole, and she refused to listen to it. Niki *didn't* think she was terrible; in fact, that girl was the only person on earth who thought Minx was *good*. If Niki said to wait, Minx could wait. She at least owed her that much.

So Minx waited. She felt a bit idiotic just sitting there at a table by herself without doing anything. She almost considered reopening the stupid textbook just so she wouldn't feel like a loser crying in a library about nothing, but the sound of footsteps coming up behind her saved her from that sorry fate.

"I'm back! Thanks for waiting for me!" Niki huffed, catching her breath as she sat back down beside Minx and plopped a box onto the table in front of them.

"Of course. I wasn't gonna ditch ya after I made ye listen to all my problems on yer birthday." Minx replied matter-of-factly.

The Hufflepuff furrowed her eyebrows, "*Our* birthday. And you didn't make me do anything. I did it all by myself."

"Whatever..." Minx muttered, glancing over at the box on the table. "So what'd ye bring?"

Niki grinned, opening the box with a flourish. "Ta da!" She exclaimed, showing off a misshapen lump of pink and yellow birthday cake. "I sneaked down to the kitchens and helped the elves make it! They didn't *want* my help, of course, but I convinced them to let me decorate it, at least."

Minx stared at the cake in surprise. It was...cute. That was the only way she could think to describe it. Although it was a bit squashed from being carted around the castle in a cardboard box, the little pink frosting swirls decorating the edges were still neat and pretty. In the center of the cake, handwritten in slightly smudged pink icing, were the words *Happy Berthday*.

"Do you like it?" Niki asked expectantly. Minx tried to answer her, but her throat felt clogged. When she opened her mouth to say something, no words came out.

"Are you okay, Minx?" the Hufflepuff girl prodded, expression one of concern. "I know it's a little bit ruined from the box, but the taste should be the same."

"Y-you spelled it wrong," Minx sniffled, cursing her own inability to keep her eyes dry. Niki looked down at the cake in confusion and then facepalmed.

"I'm sorry! English is not my first language...it's B-I-R-T-H-D-A-Y, isn't it? Maybe I can run down and fix it..."

Minx placed her hand over Niki's. When the Hufflepuff shot her a questioning look, she said, "Don't. It's perfect."

When Niki smiled at her, Minx swore she could feel the physical warmth radiating from the sunny grin.

"Oh, that makes me so happy! There's nothing I love more than sharing cake with my friends." Niki pulled a handful of little candles out of her pocket and placed several of them on the table.

“How old are you today?” she asked.

“Fifteen.”

“Oh, congratulations! I’m only thirteen...why don’t we light fourteen candles, then? Because it’s in the middle of thirteen and fifteen?”

Minx smiled softly. “That sounds lovely, Niki.”

Niki counted out the candles and arranged them delicately around the writing. Once she finished placing them, she pulled out her wand and glanced around to see if anyone was watching.

“Coast is clear,” Minx whispered. Niki nodded seriously and muttered an *Incendio* under her breath, igniting fourteen candle wicks with one quick wand movement.

“Now we have to sing!” the younger girl whispered back excitedly.

“I’m not a singer.”

“Everyone’s a singer! A voice is the one instrument everybody has!”

“Not mute people.”

Niki pouted, and Minx’s heart instantly melted. “*Please*, Minx?”

Minx sighed. “Fine. We can sing *very quietly*.”

“Once in English, once in German!”

“No, that’s not what I—”

Niki smiled and began to sing. “Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you...”

As she sat in the library and let Niki try to teach her the words to the German version of *Happy Birthday*, Minx felt happier than she had in a very long time. Perhaps she had friends at Hogwarts, after all.

## Chapter End Notes

This update has come to an end,  
So...can we get a comment, friend?  
Even if we don't reply  
We see each comment with our eyes  
And cherish all the kudos left  
By all our readers (who are the best).

Thank you for reading! This fic would be nothing without your continued support!  
Also, if anyone is interested in reading a darker AU featuring dnf in a haunted house,  
you should check out my [other fic](#) which I will be completing in a day or two!

Social media stuffs!

[ken's Twitter](#)

[ken's Tumblr](#)

[grass' Twitter](#)

[grass' Tumblr](#)

[grass' Insta](#)

## Chapter Twenty-Four || Year Four

### Chapter Summary

The winter holidays arrive.

### Chapter Notes

Heyyy, we're back!

Thank you so much for your patience! It's been a really stressful three weeks, but the update is finally here :D Enjoy!

FANART! Please check out:

[this](#) amazing fanart of George's Boggart confrontation by Toffee on Twitter!

[this](#) adorable lil doodle by bumblecat on insta!

[this](#) EPIC watercolor by Phia on Twitter! (it's seriously incredible, go click right now)

As always, make sure to tag us in your fanart so we can see it and freak out over it!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I’m sorry, *why* are you saying we need a day off next week?” George asked Dream impatiently.

George, Sapnap, and Dream were all sitting around their favorite library table, doing homework. Well, more accurately, *George* was doing homework; Dream and Sapnap were busy debating something pointless and wasting time.

“Because, George,” Dream huffed, rolling his eyes, “the twenty-ninth of November this year is Beaver Moon. It’s a national holiday.”

“Right, but *national* holidays are only celebrated by certain nations. It’s a national holiday in the US, but that doesn’t mean—”

“George!” Sapnap interrupted. “Come on, dude, can’t you just agree with us and shut up?”

“You’re in the UK, though! It’s unreasonable to expect the *British* Ministry of Magic to recognize some obscure holiday—”

Dream gasped loudly, cutting George off. “Beaver Moon is *not* an obscure holiday! How dare you!”

Sapnap nodded seriously. “Gogi, you’re being, like, super disrespectful.”

George groaned and pulled out his wand. “*Accio Magic in North America*,” he muttered. A minute later, a familiar leather-bound book landed in his lap in response to the summoning charm.

“Really? You’re pulling out a book for this?” Dream scoffed. “Nerd.”

George hummed as he flipped through dog-eared pages. “You’re the one who gave this book to me for my birthday last year.”

“Yeah, ‘cuz I know how much of a *nerd* you are.”

“Found it,” George said, pointing to an open page in the book. “It says here that the Beaver Moon is celebrated by the Algonquian magical peoples of the Great Lakes and New England regions.” George looked up from the text to eye Dream up and down. “Sorry, Dream, but you do not look Native American.”

Sapnap reached over and slammed the book shut. “George, we’re global citizens. We should celebrate *all* the holidays.”

“That’s not how that works! You can’t just randomly celebrate a holiday because you want to skive off!”

“He thinks so little of us, Dream. I’m actually kind of hurt right now.”

“Well...” Dream bit his lip and shrugged. “I guess I kinda get his point.”

Sapnap shot Dream a disbelieving look. “*Dude*, really? That’s all it takes for you to change your mind? One little comment from Gogi?”

Dream scowled, a faint blush reddening his cheeks. “Well, when you think about it, it does seem kinda wrong for us to start appreciating a culture just ‘cuz we wanna ditch school.” Dream glanced at George after the words left his mouth, giving the Ravenclaw a tentative smile. George returned it warmly, heart stuttering in his chest when Dream’s blush deepened.

Sapnap made a gagging sound. “You two are just — *ugh*.” He stood from his seat dramatically and pointed a finger at Dream. “Dream, you are *such* a simp. Imma get outta here because I’m third wheeling so hard right now.”

“*Hey!*” Dream called out as Sapnap began making his way out of the library, “I don’t know what that word means, but whatever it is I’m definitely *not* one!”

“Whatever, simp!”

Dream muttered something insulting under his breath before turning to George with questioning eyes. “Hey George, what’s a *simp*? Is it a No-Maj thing?”

“Er...”

“WHO’S A SIMP? IS IT WILBUR?”

Dream and George both groaned in unison at the loud interruption. From her position at her desk, Madame Pince shot a pointed glare at the source of the noise and lifted an angry finger to her lips.

“‘Ello, boys! We’re talkin about Wilbur, aren’t we? That wanker’s the biggest simp on the planet, he is! Y’see, I have this babysitter — well, I *had* a babysitter, I don’t need her anymore because I am basically a grown man, right — and her name’s Sally! Lovely girl, very short, though, and Wilby keeps making a fool of himself in front of her! You know, I used to think he was *good* with the ladies, but he’s never even had a girlfriend! Can you believe it? I even asked him for advice on women — no wonder he never answered! I thought it was because he was ignorin me on purpose,

but he just didn't fuckin know what to say!"

"Yeah that...definitely sounds like the reason." George nodded slowly, glancing at Dream helplessly as Tommy settled himself into a chair at their table. "Erm, keep it down, though, will you?"

Tommy grimaced, meeting Madame Pince's glare with a sheepish grin, "Right, library, sorry 'bout that— you know, I don't think I've even *been* to a library before I came to this school! Everything you'd want to know in the world is on the computer, so what's even the point of 'em?! I bet this library doesn't even *have* books about getting girlfriends— wait, have *you* boys ever had girlfriends?!"

Dream and George both winced in unison at the question, meeting each other's uncomfortable gazes across the table. "It's—" George began, struggling to find the right words to escape the conversation, "—a long story."

Tommy raised an eyebrow at that. "Mate, it's a yes or no question. Can't be that long, can it?"

"Right, well..." George trailed off, watching Dream as he attempted to sink as deeply into his chair as possible.

Tommy glanced between the two fourth-years with narrowed eyes. "You two keep lookin at each other an awful lot—" a sudden realization seemed to hit the boy and he gasped. "Oh! Are you two dating each *other*?"

"What— no!" George spluttered, as Dream planted his face into his own hands.

"Oh my god," he mumbled between his fingers.

"No, we're not dating *each other*," George continued, feeling his face begin to heat up, "That's— that's— no! No."

Tommy's eyes flitted between the two, seeming unconvinced. "Right... well, if you don't want me *knowin* about it, that's fine." He shrugged, leaning back in his chair, "BUT if you *do* you don't hafta worry about me being a dickhead, yeah? I'm not some homophobic fool, I support—LGBT is pogchamp, fellas, so I'm not here to judge or anything. I mean, *I* only kiss women because the ladies all love me, except for the ones who love each other— those are the lesbians, but even the lesbians love me. Not in the 'they want to kiss me' way, because I am not a girl, I am a Big Man, but they love me like 'oh he's funny in 'e' because I am *very* funny—"

"Tommy, why are you here again?" George cut him off, gritting his teeth.

Tommy blinked, "Oh, erm...right, well, I've actually got a very *special* assignment to do. Y'see the teachers' assistant here, his name is Philza Magic, d'you know 'im? Great lad, he told me that if I want to get extra credit I could read the thickest book in the library by tonight and he'd give me House points *and* raise my grade! He's so great, isn't he?"

George nodded slowly, wondering why Philza would offer first-years extra credit opportunities. "Yeah, he's wonderful... mind telling me what you were doing when he told you about this... 'extra credit'?"

"Oh, he was in the middle of talking to Technobitch and Wilbur, probably about something *stupid*," Tommy rolled his eyes, waving off the memory, "Then *I* walked in because I wanted to ask him about my last test, and so I started asking him if it got graded already and what I should focus on studying for next time and such, and halfway through me asking him he just told me— he said he'd



give me extra credit!"

"Oh, wow," George said. *That makes a lot of sense*, he thought to himself as he stared at the bubbly Gryffindor boy practically *vibrating* with energy.

"That's very generous of him," Dream supplied.

"I know! I wish my old school had people like him. He knew *exactly* what I wanted before I could ask for it—he just gave me a chance for a higher score! It was like he could read my mind or something! Wait, *can* he read my mind?! Is there a mind reading spell? How advanced is *that*, do you think? I reckon I could do it if I really wanted—"

"Tommy? Fuck, where is that little gremlin child?" an exasperated sounding voice echoed from the library entrance, cutting Tommy off.

The Gryffindor scowled, crossing his arms over his chest before shouting back a response. "YEAH, I'M HERE! WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

Madame Pince's angry shushing reached them only a second before George's curly haired roommate did.

"Thank god," Wilbur sighed in relief. "Manhunting is *not* my thing. I've only checked here and I'm already exhausted," he chuckled. "Philza just wanted me to tell you that he changed his mind about that, erm, 'extra credit.'"

Tommy leapt to his feet, jaw dropping in shock. "Wha—! Why?! What the fuck, Wilbur? Why would he do that?!" Tommy exclaimed.

Wilbur rolled his eyes. "I told him it's cruel to fuck with your grades," he muttered under his breath.

"*What?! Stop mumbly to yourself and answer me, bitch!*"

"I *said* that I told him— er," Wilbur paused and thought carefully about his next words. "I told Phil that you...don't...*need* to read dusty library books. Yes, that is what I told him."

Tommy scoffed. "It's not about *needing* it, Wilbur! I want to do well in this fancy wizard school! How is the wizard world supposed to know who I am if I stay on the easy levels? See, now I've lost my chance because of you. I hope you're happy now, you wanker!"

Wilbur huffed and crossed his arms. "Whatever, Tommy. Anyway, I came here to tell you that Phil changed his mind about *what* your extra credit is."

Tommy shot Wilbur a glare. "Well if it's not reading a big dusty book, what is it, then?"

"Instead of just *reading*, you have to do..." he shoved his hand into the pockets of his robe, feeling around until he pulled out a folded up newspaper, "This! Er— you have to write an essay about this. *Many* essays, actually. Phil wants you to write a separate essay about every single current event described in the newspaper. That should take you a lot longer — erm, I mean, it should be a lot more interesting — than reading a book."

Tommy snatched the paper out of Wilbur's hand, his eyes quickly scanning the front cover. "Current events? I'm bloody good at current events. Philza's going to give me *extra extra* credit, he is. Hey, Wil, two of these articles are about the same thing, so can I just merge them into one essay? 'W.A.P. Publishes Experiment Results' and 'Wartime Widow Continues to Demand

*Transparency*’ are practically the same thing, innit?”

Wilbur nodded absently, already on his way out of the library. “Yeah, sure! Make sure to take your time!” he called out, ignoring the shushing from Madame Pince and quickly ducking out into the hallway and out of sight. Tommy mumbled a string of profanities and flicked through the copy of *The Prophet*, diligently noting each and every headline.

“Joke’s on Philza Magic, I *love* current events. Look, fellas, it says here that there’s going to be a Quidditch game between the Caerphilly Catapults and the Appleby Arrows next week! I wonder if Tubbo and I could sneak out to see it...”

At the mention of Caerphilly, Dream leaned over the desk and snatched the paper out of Tommy’s hands. The Gryffindor spluttered indignantly as the Slytherin quickly read the front cover and pursed his lips.

“Hey! Give that back, you—”

Dream waved Tommy off with a hand. “Wow. I didn’t think Dad would *actually* go public with any results,” he said to himself as he absorbed the words on the page. George shifted uneasily in his seat.

“What’s it say?” the Ravenclaw asked, eyes trained on Dream’s scrunched up face. The blond swallowed and pushed the paper back across the table to Tommy, who shoved it in his bag.

“A bunch of boring data. Nothing exciting,” Dream answered dismissively. The way he didn’t look George in the eyes as he said the words made something in George’s chest stir unpleasantly.

“Well, *I’m* going to see Tubbo. He is so much cooler than you lot,” Tommy announced, standing up from his seat and giving the two fourth-years pointed looks. “Hufflepuff’s got a much better common room for studying, anyway. They’re right next to the kitchens! Those bastards can just demand food whenever they bloody want!”

George glanced at Dream, who was still avoiding his gaze. “Er— yeah. That’s great, Tommy,” George mumbled.

“Of course it’s great! It’s food on demand! I’m a growing young man, you know, I need my calories. I think I’ll ask the elves to make me a pizza. And biscuits. Or pizza *with* biscuits — actually, that sounds incredible, that does. Right — bye!”

With that, the Gryffindor boy was off. George shook his head as he watched him jog past a very exasperated librarian and dart out into the hallway. Dream was still uncharacteristically quiet when George turned to face him.

“Hey, are you alright?” he inquired, poking the blond with the tip of his pen. Dream smiled in response, but it didn’t reach his eyes.

“Yeah. I guess I’m just...stressed.” Dream shrugged his shoulders and thumbed at the corner of his Potions textbook. “Slughorn’s been an ass about citations lately. He thinks I *plagiarized* my last assignment. I can’t believe I have to rewrite all ninety-four inches of parchment. It’s ridiculous. I should just—”

George interrupted Dream by placing a hand on his shoulder. The Slytherin tensed under George’s fingertips, green eyes trailing down to the point of contact. “Uh, George? What are you—”

“You’re rambling.” George released his grip on Dream, noting how his friend relaxed as he did so.

“You only ever ramble like this when you’re hiding something.”

The words were gentle, but Dream bristled, regardless. “I’m not—”

“Dream. I know you. What’s wrong?” George continued, voice low and even. When his best friend didn’t answer him, George thought back to their earlier exchange with Tommy. “Was it something in the paper?” he asked. Dream sunk down into his chair at the question.

“Uh...no.”

“Dream.”

“It isn’t anything—”

“Dream.”

“George, I—”

“*Dream*. You’re obviously nervous about whatever was in *The Prophet*, so why won’t you tell me about it?”

Dream’s shoulders sagged. The blond planted his face on the library table with a quiet groan, mumbling something that George couldn’t quite discern. The Ravenclaw nudged him until he repeated his words.

“Randolph,” Dream said with his eyes closed.

For a few seconds, George couldn’t place *why* the name sounded familiar. But the far off look in Dream’s eyes combined with the subtle fear lacing his friend’s tone quickly jogged his memory.

“Your Boggart,” he stated. Dream’s silence was telling.

George’s mind raced with fleeting thoughts and images. He could still picture the black and white creature in his mind, could still clearly remember its wide, mismatched eyes. If he really focused, he could even hear the thing’s strange, human-like voice asking Dream about some sort of injection.

*Randolph.*

“Was...was that... *thing*...in the paper?” George questioned. Dream winced.

“Boy,” the blond whispered in response.

“What?”

“He wasn’t a thing. He was a boy.”

George’s heart sank at the way Dream spoke of the creature — person? — in the past tense.

“O...*kay*,” he continued, biting the inside of his cheek. “Are you going to elaborate at all, or do I have to keep asking you all these questions?”

Dream sat up at the comment, rubbing his eyes with balled up hands and making a noise of frustration. George waited for his best friend to explain himself, knowing that Dream would speak when he was ready. Finally, after about a minute of heavy silence, he cleared his throat.

“Ranboo—uh, well, Randolph...” Dream began, glancing nervously at George as he spoke, “was a...*test-subject-at-the-W.A.P-who-was-injected-with-Enderman-blood.*”

George blinked as he attempted to process the words that tumbled out of his best friend’s mouth. When it became clear that Dream had no intention of repeating himself, George sighed.

“Can you say it again, *slowly*? ” he requested. Reluctantly, Dream did.

“He was a test subject. At the W.A.P. He was, uh, injected with Enderman blood.”

George’s mouth went dry.

“Pardon?”

“I said he was a test subject at the—”

“No, I know what you said. I’m just...confused. That thing was a person?”

In a small voice, Dream said, “A Squib.”

George was lost for words.

“How...what...I don’t...” he was so taken aback by the new information that he couldn’t string together a single sentence. Dream grimaced at his reaction.

“Say something,” he pleaded, worry lacing his tone. George ran a hand through his hair before looking his best friend in the eye again.

“What do you want me to say, Dream? I’m *thinking*,” he huffed. “Your dad has been experimenting on *people*? On *kids*? Not just any kids, b-but... *Squibs*? ”

Every word caused Dream to shrink further and further into his seat. “Yeah.”

“And you *knew* about it?”

Dream nodded, saying nothing.

“Wh—? And you didn’t think to *tell* me about it?!”

“It wasn’t like we could stop it, George! Please, I just didn’t see the point in making you all upset when there was *nothing* we could have done to change anything!”

“Of course we could have done something! We could have b-broken in, or told someone in the Ministry—”

“My dad has the Ministry wrapped around his finger,” Dream spat bitterly. “You know as well as I do that they all think he’s a genius who can do no wrong.”

George shook his head. “But *surely* experimenting on children goes against some sort of ethical code. Someone would have stepped in if we’d just—”

“You didn’t *read* that paper, George,” Dream interrupted. “They make it sound all feel-good and happy. ‘*Eagerly consenting participants*’ and ‘*promising results*’ and a whole bunch of bullshit. They talk about Ranboo like he *wanted* to be a part of it all.”

“Who’s Ran—”

“Randolph, sorry. Ranboo’s a nickname.”

“Wait, you knew this child well enough to have a *nickname* for him and you *still* didn’t make an effort to stop his...his *torture*?!”

“I’m *sorry*, okay?” Dream burst out. George realized abruptly that his best friend had tears streaming down his face. “I *wanted* to h-help him, b-but I didn’t know *how*. I-I f-felt hopeless, and I-I know not telling you w-was shitty.”

George swallowed. When he spoke, hurt colored his tone. “I never would have expected you to do anything by yourself, Dream,” he said quietly. “But I thought you would have trusted me enough to tell me, at least. We could have talked about this thing together.”

“I—”

“I’m your *best friend*,” George continued, wiping a tear of his own away with the sleeve of his robe. “I shouldn’t have had to find out about this through a stupid *Boggart* and a newspaper article. You should have trusted me enough to tell me.”

Dream’s expression was pained. “I *do* trust you, George. There’s no one in this world who I trust more than you!”

George stood up from his seat and gathered his books in his arms. Dream whimpered as he took a step back from the library table, the sound piercing straight through George’s heart.

“I need to think. And study. But mostly think,” he said, eyes refusing to meet Dream’s watery gaze.

Dream nodded. “Okay,” he whispered brokenly.

George turned and made his way out of the library. It took all of his willpower not to turn back around and throw his arms around his idiot best friend, but hurt and betrayal kept him focused.

He didn’t know what all of this new information meant, yet. He couldn’t even fathom why Dream had decided to keep it all a secret from him. He only knew one thing for certain: the situation in Caerphilly was much, much worse than he’d previously thought.

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That night, George told Techno about everything that had transpired between him and Dream. The pink haired boy processed all of the information with a straight face, only cutting in a couple of times to clarify a few details of the story. When George was done speaking, Techno sighed.

“I knew it would come to this eventually,” he murmured to himself. “Those lyin’ bastards...”

George nodded seriously and took a seat on the edge of his bed. “So what should we do?”

Techno paused and shot George a questioning look. “Heh?”

“You know,” George clarified, “about the human testing. Who should we tell? Dream saw everything with his own eyes. If the Ministry has some sort of ethics board, we can—”

“*Ethics board*? George, this is the Ministry of Magic we’re talkin’ about. They’re a *government*

institution.”

George blew out an impatient breath through his nose. “*Yes*, which is precisely why we need to report the W.A.P.! The Ministry needs to shut the operation down!”

“Shut the operation—George, do you not get what’s goin’ on here?” Techno questioned incredulously. “The Ministry doesn’t give a crap about any of this stuff. They’re in on the whole thing.”

George’s face fell. “But that’s ridiculous. Surely if they only knew what was going on behind closed doors—”

“They *know*, George. Trust me. Selwyn was right when he said there’s nothin’ a buncha kids can do about it.”

George narrowed his eyes, feeling his face heat up in anger. “So-so that’s it? We just, what, give up because we’re a bunch of kids that can’t do anything?!” he spat, balling his fists to keep his hands from shaking. “We have all this information and *nobody* can do *anything* about it?!”

Techno turned and looked contemplatively out their dorm window. “He who knows when he can fight and when he cannot, will be victorious,” he muttered. George rolled his eyes at the quote.

“How does that—”

“We *wait*, George. We’ve gotta be willin’ to wait for it.”

George’s shoulders sagged. “It feels wrong, though. To just stand still while real people are getting hurt.”

“Don’t think about it like that,” Techno answered, meeting George’s gaze determinedly, “we’re not standing still. We’re lyin’ in wait.”

George tilted his head in question. “We’re...waiting.”

“Correct. We’re waitin for the opportune moment to strike. We’re collectin’ information, we’re becomin’ smarter and smarter so that when we *do* strike—” Techno whipped out his wand and wordlessly lit the wick of a candle on his nightstand. The dim orange light cast his face in shadows, giving him a menacing aura.

“—they won’t know what hit ‘em.”

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Dream looked relieved when George sat next to him at lunch the day after their little confrontation in the library. He immediately opened his mouth to try to apologize, but George cut him off with a smile and a hand on his arm.

“I know, Dream,” he said quietly. “I know you’re sorry. I just needed time to think.”

Dream’s eyes went wide, a hopeful glint reflected in his green irises. “You’re not mad?”

George shrugged. “I was. Honestly, I’m still a bit irritated that you didn’t tell me, but I know you

must've been frightened."

"So frightened, George. I was scared shitless."

"You pooped yourself? That's disgusting," the Ravenclaw teased. Dream huffed and raised his goblet of pumpkin juice to his lips to hide his blush.

"I was scared shit- *less*, Gogi. That means there was *no* shit. You're supposed to be the smart one here."

Lunch flew by in a flurry of banter and talk of the upcoming winter holidays. Everyone seemed eager for the semester to conclude, even if it meant they'd have to study their arses off in preparation for the end of term exams, the mere mention of which elicited groans from both Sapnap and Dream.

"Why do they give us so many *tests* in this place?" Dream groaned as the fourth-years stood up from the table and began making their way to their next class. "We already get a ton of homework. Why can't they just give us grades based on that?"

"You mean the homework you only turn in about half the time?"

"Yes!"

"He doesn't even see the irony."

"I see it, you moron, I just choose not to acknowledge it."

"Lads, lads," Wilbur said, stepping in between the two friends and throwing an arm over each of their shoulders, "cease your endless bickering. The question isn't *why*, it's *how*."

"What? That makes no sense," Dream rebuked. "Everyone knows *how* we have exams."

"Yeah, Wilbur, what are you on about?" George wondered.

Wilbur seemed to delight in their confusion, smiling as he waltzed into the M&M classroom. "Plan for what is difficult while it is easy, do what is great while it is small, boys!"

Behind Dream and George, Techno groaned. "You're misusin' my quotes again, Wilbur!"

"Ah, dear Technoblade, it isn't misuse if our friends can glean wisdom from my words!"

"We can't," Dream butted in.

Suddenly, Professor Borealis coughed, signalling to everyone that it was time for the lesson to begin.

"If we're exchanging our favorite words of wisdom, might I share mine?" she asked, not waiting for a response before continuing, "'No matter how busy you may think you are, you must find time for reading, or surrender yourself to self-chosen ignorance.' Open your textbooks, you lot! You have exams coming up soon!"

And have exams they did.

George got so little rest over the course of exam week that he could count the number of hours of sleep he'd had on one hand. The rest of the group was doing almost as badly as he was, except for Techno, who insisted that exercising his brain too much would leave it sore. The boy had gotten

the perfect number of recommended hours of sleep and nearly as perfect scores when their test results came out.

After scores were shared, bragged about, and hidden, it felt like the entire school breathed a collective sigh of relief as the time came to finally board the Hogwarts Express. Dream and Sapnap raced each other to their usual compartment, kicking snow up in their wakes and earning stern shouts from nearby professors. George rolled his eyes fondly at his friends' antics, bending over to pick up a bright green Slytherin scarf which Dream had dropped in his rush to reach the train.

"You're kind of the mum friend of the group, aren't you, George?" Wilbur remarked as he eyed the scarf clutched in George's hands. George blushed and shook his head.

"I am *not* the mum," he stated, shooting Wilbur a glare. Beside the curly haired boy, Eret chuckled.

"If you're not the mum, does that make you...the daddy?" they teased, prompting Wilbur to burst into a fit of giggles.

George crossed his arms and pushed ahead of the group. "I expected better of you, Eret," he threw over his shoulder before climbing aboard the train.

Dream was waiting for him in their compartment. The blond patted the seat beside him as George opened the door. Sapnap rolled his eyes at the gesture.

"I hope you enjoy that seat, Gog," the Gryffindor said, voice dripping with mock bitterness. "This moron actually *punched* me when I tried to sit in it. Freakin simp."

"Stop calling me that!" Dream huffed. George leaned into Dream's space and brought his hands up to the blond's head, causing a look of confusion to grace his freckled face before he realized that George intended to wrap the forgotten green scarf around his neck.

"Aww. Cute," Sapnap commented before gagging dramatically as he watched the Ravenclaw drape the cloth carefully over Dream's shoulders. Once George was satisfied with the way the scarf looked, he sat back in his seat and admired the way the embroidered serpent rested above Dream's heart.

"You're lucky you ended up in Slytherin," George said. "Green looks nice on you."

He expected Dream to respond with a teasing comment or a playful insult, but instead the blond spluttered and stared down at his lap. "Thanks," he muttered.

Across from the two best friends, Sapnap snorted. "You guys are so weird, you know that?" he declared. "I mean, seriously, you two act like you're—"

Sapnap didn't get to finish his sentence because Wilbur chose that very moment to throw the compartment door open and waltz in with his guitar in hand. "Alright, lads! Who wants to sing Christmas carols the entire way back to London?"

"I'm not sittin here anymore," Techno grimaced as Eret rolled their eyes behind him and pushed him into the cart.

"Oh, Techno, it sounds to me like you need a little Christmas cheer to brighten your mood!" Wil said, giving his guitar a sharp strum to underscore his point. "Everyone, on the count of three! One, two, three!"

Wilbur began to strum a tune with which George was unfamiliar, but which caused every other



person in the compartment to groan.

“Please no. Not this song,” Techno pleaded. His pleas fell on deaf ears, though, because Wilbur smiled impossibly wider and began to sing.

*“Accio Christmas, Christmas come to me*

*Accio Christmas, calling out to thee*

*Accio Christmas, we've waited so long*

*to summon your magic with a Christmas song...”*

As Wilbur proceeded to belt out the tune, George understood why the song choice had been met with little enthusiasm. The melody was repetitive, pitchy, and grating.

*“Accio Christmas, come bring out the joy*

*Accio Christmas, every girl and boy*

*sings Accio Christmas, all through the year*

*'til the jingle bell season is finally here!”*

“Um, Wilbur?” George said, clearing his throat, “perhaps you could play a different song? Maybe Jingle Bells?”

Wilbur paused his strumming to give George an odd look. “What song is that?”

“Jingle bells. Er...you know... *jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way...?”*

Wil laughed and shook his head. “That’s the tune of ‘Golden Snitch,’ Gogi. But sure, we can sing that.” Wilbur played a quick introduction on his instrument before bursting into song once more.

*“Golden snitch, golden snitch, flying far away!*

*High above the quidditch pitch, it waits for us to pla-AY!”*

George smiled and hummed along despite not knowing the words. Everyone in the compartment seemed happier; Wilbur’s cheerfulness was infectious.

*Click.*

The unmistakable sound of a camera shutter met George’s ears. When he turned around, he saw Dream hastily putting the device back in his book bag.

“*Dream!*” George whined, half heartedly shoving his best friend’s shoulder. Dream chuckled and threw an arm around the shorter boy.

“Just shut up and keep singing,” the blond muttered in George’s ear. George tried not to give too much thought to the shiver that traveled down his spine at his friend’s words.

At some point, George fell asleep to the sound of his roommate’s singing and the gentle shaking of Dream’s shoulders every time the Slytherin laughed.

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Dream had been scandalized when, on the fifth day of their winter break, George announced that they were too old for snowmen.

“*What?!*”

George blinked back at him like he *hadn't* just said something blasphemous. “Erm, I said I haven’t built a snowman since I was twelve. We’re a bit old for it, aren’t we?”

Dream’s jaw dropped in shock. “*George!* I am disowning you as a friend if you aren’t suited up and ready to build in five minutes!”

The Ravenclaw looked at Dream incredulously. “What? I don’t even *own* snow trousers anymore because my old ones are too small. I can’t just—“

“Bring them out here,” Dream instructed without missing a beat. “I’ll have Bippy cast an enlargement charm on them. There are *no* excuses for snowman avoidance!”

After a few more feeble protests, George finally made his way inside to fetch his gear. Dream bounced excitedly in place as he waited for his friend to return, grinning when the other boy finally came outside with an old pair of snow pants slung over his shoulder.

“I’ll be right back! Don’t move!” Dream said, snatching the article of clothing from George and sprinting back to his own house to change. Schlatt glanced at him curiously when he burst through their bedroom door and flung open his closet.

“In a hurry, Dream-boat?” Schlatt asked with a raised eyebrow. Dream only spared a fraction of a second to nod before he unceremoniously tugged on a pair of snow overalls.

“Bippy!” he summoned. The House-elf apparated into the room instantly and stood at attention. “Make these bigger for me,” he commanded.

The elf performed the charm and swiftly handed the garment back. Dream took it and immediately bolted out of the room and out the front door.

“George!” he called out excitedly, tossing the pants to the boy waiting patiently in the snow. “Quick, change into these!”

George caught the article of clothing and sighed wistfully. “I wish enlargement charms were permanent,” he remarked as he made his way inside to change.

Dream refrained from offering to buy George a brand new set of snow gear and instead just waited for his friend to return. He didn’t understand why George never let Dream buy him things, but he knew better than to push the issue. It always made George sad, and Sad George made Sad Dream.

After what felt like an eternity, the two boys were finally dressed for the snow. They waddled over to the edge of George’s backyard before Dream threw a hand out and stopped George from taking another step forward.

“Do you see that, George?”

“See what?”

“That,” Dream said, gesturing to the untouched expanse of snow-covered land before them. “This, George, is a blank canvas.”

George shrugged. “Alright.”

“No, I don’t think you understand. George, have you ever made a snow-wizard?”

“What’s a—“

“That’s what I thought. Watch and learn.”

Dream took two careful steps forward and turned to face his curious friend. He counted to three in his head before allowing himself to fall backwards into the pristine snow and beginning to drag his arms up and down.

“You’re just making a snow angel!” George exclaimed, laughing at Dream’s antics. When Dream finally stood up to assess his work, he grinned proudly and patted George on the back.

“Your turn!”

They spent about fifteen minutes just laughing and rolling around in the snow, taking breaks every so often to pelt snowballs at each other’s heads. For a little while, Dream was transported to a time five years prior when life was simpler and they were just little kids whose only job was to have fun.

Eventually they grew bored of rolling around, and got to work rolling snow into large balls for their snowman. The process was surprisingly exhausting and took them around half an hour to complete, by which time both of them were panting and ready to collapse next to their creation.

“Did you bring your camera?” George asked once Dream finished affixing branch-arms into the sides of the snowman’s torso. Dream nodded and reached into his pocket, withdrawing the cherished device with a flourish.

“You better not delete any of my pictures,” he warned the brunet. George snorted and took the apparatus from Dream’s hand, turning it on with a press of a button and holding it up experimentally.

“Delete those awful stalker-y photos of me?” he asked rhetorically. “I would *never*.”

“Ha, ha. But seriously, don’t.”

George aimed the camera at Dream’s face and snapped a picture. When Dream opened his mouth to tell him to get a better shot, George snapped another one.

“Why are you—” *click* “—taking pictures of me—” *click* “—while I’m—” *click* “—talking?!”

George laughed. “How does it feel, Dream?”

“At least the ones I take of you are *good*!”

“Oh, really? You call *this* good?” George questioned, turning the digital camera around and displaying a candid image of George sleeping on the train with his mouth open. “This is *creepy*, Dream!”

“It was—” he stopped himself from saying *cute* and instead ended with, “—funny.”

“...Right. And this one?” George asked, showing Dream a photo of the brunet reading his

Transfiguration textbook in the Hogwarts library. “How is this one funny?”

“Humor is subjective!”

“Dream, this is actually ridiculous,” George said with a smile as he flicked through the digital gallery. “You’re *obsessed* with me.”

Dream’s mouth opened and closed several times, because what was he supposed to say to that?

He waited for George to confront him with another photo and raced to think up another excuse for his paparazzi behavior, but to his surprise, the Ravenclaw went silent. The brunet’s expression was hard to read, but Dream could clearly see that his lips were turned downwards at the corners.

“...George?” Dream said nervously. “I’ll delete them if you’re uncomfortable. I’m sorry, I should’ve asked you before taking them—”

“Enderman Study Number Three?”

When George looked up from the camera, there was unmistakable horror reflected in his brown eyes. Dream felt the blood drain from his face.

“Shit,” he said, taking a step forward. “George, I—”

George took a step back and continued to scan the digital display. “*Subject no longer remembers own name. Hair shows signs of discoloration,*” he read, voice shaky.

“C’mon, George, just let me—”

“*Subject has deteriorated drastically. No signs of controllable magic. Termination recommended.* Dream, please tell me this doesn’t mean what I think it does.”

“It’s—”

George dropped the camera in the snow. His shoulders began to shake.

“Dream,” he whispered, “did your father murder a child?”

Dream swallowed. “Listen, George, I *told* you that I couldn’t—”

“You’re not answering the question.”

Dream felt like he was at a crossroads where all paths lead to disaster.

“Yes.”

George cradled his head in his hands and made a pained noise that went straight to Dream’s heart. “I d-didn’t...I didn’t th-think that...” he gasped, struggling to articulate his thoughts.

“George, please...there was *nothing* I could do!”

George shook his head. Suddenly, his demeanor shifted, anger overpowering the horror and despair. “You knew there was a child *dying* in that laboratory in Caerphilly and y-you didn’t even *try* to stop it!”

“My dad would never have let me—“

“I don’t fucking care about your dad, Dream, this is about *you*! It was bad enough that you kept this from me, but now I find out that there are *dead children* in Wales and you had photographic evidence of it and did *nothing*!”

Dream blinked away tears of his own and tried to inject as much remorse into his voice as he could when he said, “It wasn’t like I could’ve stopped it! I don’t even *go* to the lab anymore because I know what Dad’s doing there is messed up!”

“But that’s even worse! That means you turned your back on innocent people who you *knew* were being *murdered*!”

“I told you I’m sorry,” Dream offered brokenly. “I’m not a bad person, George, I’m not! I swear the only reason I didn’t tell you about the photos a few weeks ago when we were talking in the library is because I’m a forgetful idiot. I meant it when I said that there’s no one else in the world I trust more than you.”

George threw his hands up. “Well, it doesn’t *look* like it! Any other secrets I should know about? Do you have any bodies in your backyard? Skeletons in your closet, perhaps?”

“*No!*”

George aimed an angry kick at the base of their snowman, causing the spheres to come toppling down in a snowy heap. Dream didn’t even have time to mourn the loss before George was walking back towards his house.

“Where are you going?” Dream called out to George’s retreating figure.

“Home,” George answered without even looking over his shoulder. “I need time to think.”

That was how Dream wound up alone, kneeling in the snow next to the pitiful remains of their snowman and wondering how such a terrific day had gone so terribly wrong.

~~~~~

After a week, George was still mad at him.

George was mad at him because he was an idiot who didn’t think to tell him the whole story. George was mad at him because he *forgot to mention the fucking termination* and Dream wanted to curl up in a ball and cry.

George had a tendency to retreat into himself when he was upset, and Dream hated it. It meant that his owls went unanswered and his apologies unheard. By the time Christmas rolled around, Dream grew so desperate for George’s attention that he went to the nearest Muggle shop and asked to purchase a cellphone.

“Er—sorry?” the lady at the cash register said upon hearing his request. “This is a Tesco Express, Sir.”

“Okay...” Dream said, impatient, “I need a cellular telephone. How much will one cost?”

The employee looked at him like he was from another planet, which, to be fair, he kind of was.

“We don’t sell cell phones here. This is a supermarket.”

“Then where can I get one?”

She squinted at him from behind her glasses, a look of concern overtaking her expression. “Are you alright, mate? D’you need me to call someone for you?”

Dream sighed in relief. “Yes, please,” he said quietly, hands trembling as the kind woman asked him what number to dial. He knew George’s phone number by heart and recited it without hesitation.

He pressed the receiver to his ear and listened to the dial tone.

*Ring. Ring. Ring.*

“—Hello?”

Dream’s mouth went dry at the sound of George’s voice.

“H-hey, George.”

A moment passed in silence. Then, finally, “Dream? Whose phone are you calling from?”

“I borrowed a nice lady’s at the Tesco Express.”

“At the Tes—? Dream, are you okay? Are you hurt?”

Dream blew out a breath from his nose. It felt good to hear George’s concern, even if it was only temporary. “Yeah, I’m fine. I j-just— I *miss* you, George,” he confessed, desperation seeping into his voice. “You haven’t been answering my owls, your mom said you weren’t home when I came to see you—“

“Dream,” George’s voice came through the receiver, “I told you I needed to think.”

“I know,” Dream whined in response, “But I really don’t think ignoring me is going to solve anything. Why don’t we think together? You know, talk it out?”

He heard George chuckle humorlessly on the other end of the line. “That’s not how thinking works.”

“Yes it is! People think together all the time. That’s what study groups are for.”

“This is a lot more serious than a study group, Dream.”

“I *get* that, but I still think we should—“

“I’ll talk to you when I’m ready, yeah? I need you to respect that.”

A whimper escaped Dream’s lips before he could stop himself. “Are...are we still friends, George?” he asked timidly, clutching the cellphone to his ear like a lifeline.

A pause, followed by an audible exhale. “Yes. We’re still friends.”

“Good. B-because I lo—“

Dream didn’t get the chance to finish his sentence before George hung up on him.

He handed the phone back to the Tesco lady with a murmured thank you. She took it from him with pursed lips.

“Relationship problems?” she asked in a mildly curious tone.

Dream shrugged. “I guess you could say that.”

He left Tesco with a heavy heart.

~~~~~

He didn’t see George again until they were both at King’s Cross after their holidays had concluded, preparing to board the train. Dream found him laughing with his Ravenclaw friends, no doubt bonding over an inside joke Dream wouldn’t understand.

Schlatt had already wandered off, presumably to find Minx, leaving Dream with very few visible friends with whom to talk. His eyes scanned the crowd for Sapnap or Bad, but he couldn’t pick out either boy in the dense crowds. Not wanting to stand on the middle of the platform like a loser, he finally decided to wait at the edge of the crowd until it was time to board the train.

“At least I have you,” he murmured to the cat settled comfortably in his arms. Patches looked up at him with her yellow-green eyes and meowed contentedly, earning her a fond scratch on the chin.

If he’d been paying attention, Dream would have noticed the sign with giant red lettering positioned several feet away from the entrance to the platform. Due to his obliviousness, however, he didn’t see the thing until he physically bumped into it.

“Shit, sorry,” he muttered before realizing that he was apologizing to an inanimate object. He took a few steps back to read the sign, frowning when he realized what was written on it.

BLOOD DONATION STATION! ALL BLOOD ACCEPTED, MUGGLE-BORN PREFERRED! read the big red text. Beneath it, in slightly smaller writing, were the words, **SPONSORED BY THE W.A.P.** accompanied by an image of the official seal of the Ministry of Magic and an arrow pointing off to the left.

His heart sank. Dream knew — of course he knew, *everyone* knew — that the W.A.P. was accepting blood donations throughout the country. He even knew that Ollivander’s was making first-years register before purchasing their wands. But he hadn’t known that his father’s organization had gone so far as to blatantly *request donations at freaking King’s Cross*.

Before he knew what he was doing, his feet were carrying him in the direction of the arrow. A large booth soon became visible to him on the edge of the platform. As he approached, he could make out several of his father’s colleagues interacting with a small crowd of people, clearly collecting vials of blood from those waiting in line. One of the wizards, Gwydion, spotted him and waved.

“Clay! Good lad, have you come to donate to the cause?” the man chuckled, motioning for Dream to come closer. When he did, Gwydion leaned down and whispered in his ear. “We both know *your* blood isn’t what we’re after, but you can still donate if you’d like to set an example.”

A shiver traveled down Dream’s spine. He politely declined the request and breathed a sigh of

relief when the Hogwarts Express finally sounded its horn, signalling that it was time for students to board.

Instead of making a beeline for the compartment he *usually* occupied with the Ravenclaw boys, Dream decided to search for a certain other one of his Housemates. He peeked into countless different compartments, muttering many apologies under his breath before at last locating her.

The sight that greeted him on the other side of the compartment door made him do a double take.

Minx was there, but she wasn't alone. Sitting directly across from her was a Hufflepuff girl who Dream vaguely recognized as Wilbur's second-year friend. In the window seat was another young girl who Dream did *not* recognize, this one wearing Gryffindor robes. All three of them looked up at Dream when he opened the door, causing him to suddenly feel immensely awkward.

"Uh...can I talk to Minx?" he asked, wincing at the way his voice broke on the last word.

Minx and the Hufflepuff — Nina? Nancy? — exchanged glances.

"What d'ye want?" Minx demanded, eyeing him up and down coolly.

Dream ran a hand through his hair. "Um, well, I wanted to talk to you about...uh...can you just come out into the hallway for a sec and I'll tell you?"

Minx snorted. "Ye look embarrassed, Selwyn. Whatever ye have to say to me, ye can say it in front of Niki an' Puffy. Spit it out."

He contemplated his options. Since Minx was in one of her bitchy moods and clearly wasn't going to talk to him in private, Dream would have to be alright with two random girls listening in on their conversation, which...wasn't ideal. Hogwarts girls were gossipy. If he went ahead and spilled his guts to Minx, the whole school would know every word by the time the train pulled into Hogsmeade.

Sensing his trepidation, Minx shrugged and turned her nose up at him obnoxiously. "Must not be that important, then," she remarked. "Ye can see yerself out."

"It's about George."

Immediately, Minx sat up straighter in her seat. Niki and the other girl — Poofy, was it? — seemed to sense the change in atmosphere, as they both went still at the mention of the Ravenclaw boy.

"Go on," Minx said.

Dream took a deep breath. *To hell with it, then.* "We're fighting. Well, not really *fighting*, but he's pissed. He's so freaking mad at me and I don't know what to do, and, well...you're the only person I know who's ever fought with him like this before..."

"So, what, ye came to ask for advice?" Minx raised an eyebrow, her expression clearly unimpressed.

Dream nodded sheepishly. "Uh...yeah."

"My god, yer the densest motherfucker I've ever met, Selwyn. Are you seriously askin' *me* for help? *Me*? His *ex* who he *still* hasn't forgiven for her massive fuckin' mistake?"

Dream was starting to think that asking Minx hadn't been the brightest idea, but he was too far in

to back out at that point. “Yes. Yes, I am. Are you gonna help me, or are you gonna keep asking rhetorical questions?”

Minx looked like she wanted to snap at him, but the Hufflepuff girl interrupted her before she could.

“Um, if I may...” she began tentatively, glancing between the two Slytherins before continuing, “Dream, have you ever heard of the Golden Rule?”

“What’s that?” Dream asked.

“*Behandle andere so, wie du von ihnen behandelt werden willst*: treat others as you would like to be treated. Everyone hears it when they are little, but it can be hard to remember sometimes,” she informed him. “If you were George in this situation, what would you want to happen?”

Dream pursed his lips in thought while Minx threw her head back and laughed.

“Your fancy fuckin’ moral philosophy won’t work on this one, Niki,” she sneered. “Selwyn only has two brain cells, and both of ‘em are too preoccupied with drooling over his boyfriend.”

Niki smacked Minx’s knee disapprovingly. “Be nice,” she admonished.

“Yeah, *Minx*,” Dream piled on. “Be nice to me.”

The Gryffindor girl by the window withdrew her wand in what was probably supposed to be an intimidating manner and pointed the tip at Dream’s chest.

“*You* better be nice to Minx and Niki or I’ll have to hex you,” she threatened. Niki sighed and motioned for the girl to put her wand away.

“No one is hexing anybody!” she stated, turning back to Dream. “I don’t know what you did to upset your friend, but—”

“His dad’s in charge of the organization that’s hurting Muggle-borns,” Minx cut in. “Oh, and this guy himself is a hypocritical racist.”

Dream bristled. “I am *not*—”

“Stop it!” Niki huffed. “Minx, remember what we said about positive energy? And Dream, it sounds like you need to think about how your actions make you look to others. If you want forgiveness, what do you need to do to earn it?”

Dream blinked a few times and fiddled nervously with his wand in his pocket. “I don’t know,” he admitted. “I already said sorry. I said sorry *so many times*. I don’t know what else to say to him.”

Minx rolled her eyes. “Selwyn, let me ask ye this: are you still workin’ for yer dad?”

“What? No, of course not,” Dream answered immediately, crossing his arms over his chest.

“But have ye *actually* spoken up about shite? Have ye said ‘Hey, Georgie my love, today I told my arse of a father to go fuck himself! And I’m going to shout from the feckin’ rooftops how much I hate his awful organization!’ Have you *ever* stood up to anyone about anything?”

He wanted to say that *of course* he had, *of course* he’d denounced his father. He told George about how done he felt with the W.A.P. all the time. George *knew* how Dream felt about the whole thing...didn’t he?

“I can *hear* those two brain cells of his overheatin. D’ye get it now, Selwyn? D’ye see the hypocrisy?”

“Oh, Minx, be *positive*. He’s having a...what do you call it in English? An epithet? An epidemic?”

“An epiphany,” the Gryffindor girl supplied helpfully.

“Yes! Thank you, Puffy, an epiphany! He is having one of those,” Niki proclaimed with a smile.

A new sense of purpose filled Dream, then, as he realized that Minx was right. He couldn’t remember a single occasion on which he’d told his dad to his face that he didn’t support what he was doing. He’d never been vocal about current events at the lunch table, unlike Techno and Sapnap. He’d always *told* George that he supported equality — that he supported *George* — but George needed more than just his occasional verbal support.

George needed Dream to prove himself. George needed to see with his own eyes that Dream wanted nothing to do with the W.A.P.; George needed to see Dream speak out about Ranboo and the countless others who his father had clearly hurt in the name of science.

Dream needed to take an active stance.

The conductor blared the train’s horn, signaling that it was time for everyone to commit to a compartment. He could hear prefects going up and down the aisle, instructing younger students to take their seats.

“Hey, uh, can I...sit here with you guys?” he asked the three girls.

“Fuck no.”

“Of course!”

“Whatever, dude.”

Accepting their responses as approving enough, Dream hastily shut the compartment door and sat down beside Niki, who beamed at him. He understood why Wilbur enjoyed the younger girl’s company — she was impossible to dislike.

Why on earth such a kind person would ever choose to be friends with *Minx*, he had no idea. But he had more important things to do than analyze a bunch of girls’ social circles. As the three resumed whatever boring conversation they’d been having before he’d appeared, Dream took out an envelope, a pen, and a fresh piece of parchment from his book bag.

He took a deep breath before placing the tip of the ballpoint to the parchment’s smooth surface and beginning to write.

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*Dad,*

*I am writing this letter to tell you that I quit. I’m done with the W.A.P. and everything it stands for.*

*It was bad enough when you were torturing magical beasts for your stupid little science*

*experiments, but I know about all of the human testing you've been doing, too. I read the article you guys published about Randolph Boo in the paper. You lied, Dad. He wasn't a willing participant and the experiment wasn't just "a controlled test which yielded no conclusive results." Who even wrote that bullshit? I know that he died. I know he was in pain. I met him, Dad! I talked to him and he was hurting so bad. I never thought you'd murder someone. I can't believe I ever defended you and wanted to work with you. I feel ashamed to be your son.*

*I don't want anything to do with the W.A.P. It's wrong. I'm going to tell everyone the truth about your "research." You're not trying to "cure" anything, you're just trying to tell the world that a life without magic isn't worth living, and that's just not true.*

*Consider this my formal letter of resignation.*

*Sincerely,*

*Clay Ellsworth Aurelius Selwyn III*

*P.S.*

*I am legally changing my name when I turn 17. I don't even want to have the same stupid name as you.*

~~~~~

All the way back in England, a wizard set a finished letter on his desk, resolving to send it the following morning.

Dear Dream,

I am saddened by your letter, but I understand your attitude and will respect your wishes. I cannot force you to continue assisting me in my research; you are an intelligent young man who is capable of making his own decisions.

I do, however, hope that someday you will come to realize that my actions have never been motivated by greed or the pursuit of notoriety. I suppose you will not be able to believe me until you have children of your own, but it is a parent's purpose in life to provide for his or her children. As your father, I have always wanted the best for you and your sister. I have worked tirelessly my entire life to allow you both to thrive and live better lives than I did. Our personalities clash sometimes, but I am proud of the determined, talented wizard you've become. I am so happy that your sister has you to look up to as a role model.

Speaking of your sister, Drista will be turning seven years old in April, as you know, and children who have not demonstrated magical abilities by that age are, unfortunately, diagnosed as Squibs. It is a hard truth to accept for your mother and I; we've been hoping that she was simply a late bloomer whose magic would manifest with time. It is clear, however, that she is afflicted with the disease and will never experience the joys of attending Hogwarts.

I must admit, I have long suspected this to be the case — that is the precise reason I started the W.A.P. in the first place. Even though you have made your stance on curing squibness very clear, I

implore you to think about all of the magical incidents that have defined your life. Your first ride on a broomstick, your first wand, your first successful spell — doesn't Drista deserve to experience these rites of passage? How can I tell her that, due to a biological fluke, she will never be given the same opportunities as her brother?

Write soon, my son. Your family misses you dearly.

Love,

Dad

Chapter End Notes

As always, this work would be NOTHING without the support of readers like YOU! Please please please leave a comment if you liked the update. The comments we get on these never fail to brighten our days.

A little note: I (ken) have noticed that this fic has been picking up more traction recently (100K+ hits of traction lol). And, um...thank you?! It's literally so insane. When I started this little passion project in October I never dreamed it would get this far. The support that I've received from everyone (on here, on tumblr, on twitter) has blown my mind and brought me to literal tears. This fic has helped me gain confidence as a writer and just as a person in general. Heck, I've met some *best friends* through this fic. I'm rambling, but please know that I appreciate you ALL (especially you, grass, thank you for putting up with my bullshit XD).

I was thinking of doing something special to celebrate 100K hits, but like...I couldn't think of anything lol. I know some authors do Twitch/Twitter Q&As, but I always answer your questions anyway, so...every day is a Q and A! (that rhymes)

Love you guys! See you next update!

KEN:

[ken's twitter](#)

[ken's tumblr](#)

GRASS:

[grass' twitter](#)

[grass' tumblr](#)

[grass' insta](#)

Chapter Twenty-Five || Year Four

Chapter Summary

Dream did a thing.

Chapter Notes

hello again!

this would have been out a week earlier but I moved into college! I'm finally studying on campus like a normal College Kid! Wooooo!

A very special thank you goes to Phia on Twitter ([Twitter](#)) for being our lovely lil intern and doing emergency edits. Chapter would have taken several more days without her help, so please go give her some love! She's great.

FANART! Please check out:

[these](#) adorable ch. 24 scenes by imapiratematey on Twitter!

[this](#) drawing of George, [this](#) adorable ch 24 reaction doodle, [this](#) drawing of Techno on a broom, and [this](#) cutesy lil doodle by Ink on Twitter!

[this](#) absolutely stunning drawing of the boys in the train compartment by Maki on Twitter (please click, they spent so much time on it!!!)

[another one](#) by Maki — a stunning Gogi drawing :)))

[tumblr](#) and [Twitter](#) versions of Techno on a broom by the amazing Calhan! (I am not ashamed to say that this is my phone lock screen now)

[these](#) epic Technoblade quote doodles by Toffee on Twitter!

[these](#) wand paintings by the lovely intern, Phia!

If I missed you, yell at me on Twitter or in the comments!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream felt good.

No, that was an understatement: Dream felt *great*. He was beaming and humming when he returned to his dorm room in the dungeons after sending off his letter of resignation, causing all three of his roommates to look at him quizzically.

“In a good mood, Dream-boat?” Schlatt asked, sitting up in his bed.

“You could say that,” Dream replied, unbuttoning his Slytherin robes and tossing them at the foot of his four poster. GB80 grimaced at the messy behavior.

“Well, what happened?” he asked Dream, looking up from his well-loved copy of *Quidditch*

Through the Ages.

Dream pushed past Eric and nonchalantly reached into his closet for a pair of pajamas. “I did a thing,” he answered, swaggering towards the bathroom. Eric let out a sound of frustration.

“Of course you ‘did a thing,’ Selwyn, don’t be coy!” he huffed. “Tell us what happened!”

Dream paused with his hand on the bathroom door handle. Without turning around, he said, “I told my dad to go fuck himself.”

His roommates all gasped and immediately inundated him with follow-up questions, but he simply smirked and locked himself inside the bathroom, turning the shower on with a muttered command.

He did a thing, alright. And he wasn’t going to be quiet about it.

~~~~~

George felt lonely.

It was paradoxical, the way he could feel so alone even when surrounded by people. His roommates were kind and jovial as always, but they all knew that something was off. He and Dream were *best friends* — they didn’t just stop talking to each other for no reason. Thankfully for George, though, none of his Ravenclaw friends questioned the awkward tension that arose whenever the Slytherin boy was mentioned. They all knew that George would talk about it if and when he was ready.

George didn’t think he’d ever be ready.

He’d been blindsided. One moment, he and Dream had been teasing each other and building a snowman together without a care in the world, hearts light and laughter endless. The next, George found himself staring at photographic evidence of his worst fears realized.

It was emotional whiplash in the worst possible way.

“Hey, Gogi,” Wilbur whispered over the sounds of Technoblade’s snoring. “You know you can tell me anything, right? I’m a good secret keeper.”

George smiled into the darkness. Ever since they’d stepped off the Hogwarts Express, his roommates had been overly cheerful and talkative, Wilbur especially.

“I know, Wil,” George murmured, rolling over onto his side. “Thank you.”

“Of course, mate. Feel free to tell me to fuck right off if I’m overstepping, but...” Wilbur began, and George tensed underneath his eiderdown. “...I’d happily ask Dream to switch seats with me during our shared classes. Y’know, if it would make things less...uncomfortable for you.”

The offer was just so *kind* that it brought tears to George’s eyes. He was reminded of how lucky he was to have a group of friends who he knew would support him no matter what.

“That...might be good, actually,” George admitted sheepishly. He wanted to decline, but the thought of having to sit next to Dream for hours in tense silence was...well. The prospect scared him. There was a reason he hadn’t been sorted into Gryffindor.

Though he couldn't see him in the darkness, George could tell that Wilbur was smiling softly. "No problem, George," he mumbled. The words were followed by an audible yawn.

Soon enough, Wilbur's breathing evened out, alerting George that his friend was fast asleep.

George flipped his pillow over with a huff, relishing in the way the cool side pressed soothingly against his cheek. He felt exhausted, but he knew that sleep wouldn't come easily to him that night.

It was hard to sleep soundly when innocent children were being murdered not even eight hundred kilometers away.

~~~~~

Several weeks went by before George heard any word of Dream. He'd been on his way to Arithmancy when he passed a group of fourth-year girls chattering away about something, as girls in his year were wont to do. He didn't usually pay any mind to Hogwarts gossip, but the words gave him pause.

"Did you hear what Anderson said about Selwyn?"

George stopped in his tracks.

"No, what happened?" another girl continued.

"Apparently Liu heard from Zakarian who heard from Baratashvili who heard from Eric Gregoire that Selwyn told his own father to sod off."

George discretely backed up a few steps, keeping within earshot of the girls. One of the Hufflepuffs gasped and put a hand on her friend's shoulder.

"He did *not*," she said, "his father works in the *Ministry*!"

"He did! Apparently he called his dad's research racist or something. The Slytherins aren't too happy about it — lots of purebloods in that crowd."

"Well, I'll say. Sounds a bit idiotic, doesn't it? This whole 'racist this' 'racist that.' My cousin's a Squib and I don't see the problem with him having magic."

"Me, neither. I donated blood last week. Selwyn's probably just mouthing off for attention — you've seen how he gets. He's always so whingey with his friends."

George's breath hitched and his shoulders tensed. They were talking about Dream, obviously, but it was difficult for him to reconcile the words they were saying with the feud that he and Dream were still very much having.

He glanced down at his wristwatch, grimacing when he saw he had mere minutes to get to class on time. It was far too tempting to keep following the girls silently, to be a fly on the wall and gather as much information on the Slytherin boy as he could. But he *hated* being late to class, and the fear of disappointing his professor outweighed any potential insight he might gain from eavesdropping.

Besides, gossip was notoriously unreliable. The only way to ensure any level of truth was to get the facts directly from the horse's mouth, and that meant there was only one thing he could do if he wanted any insight into Dream's thoughts: he had to ask him what was going on.

He took a deep breath. It was just *Dream*. George wasn't scared of Dream; they'd grown up

together. Sure, they were going through a rough patch, but they were still *best friends*. If Dream really *had* had a sudden change of heart, George wanted — no, he *needed* — to know about it.

So then why did the thought of asking Dream about the W.A.P. scare him so much?

Because you're worried he'll never change, that little voice in the back of his head supplied. *You're scared he'll become the monster you saw in your Boggart.*

He stepped into the Arithmancy classroom mere seconds before the bell tolled. He greeted Professor Vector breathlessly before walking over to his desk, mentally preparing himself for inevitable confrontation with his deskmate. Head lowered, he pulled out his chair and sat down with a huff, opening his mouth and turning to face his neighbor —

— and meeting the cheerful gaze of none other than Alastair Eretson.

“Hey, George,” they said with a smile. “I thought you might be late. I know how uptight you can get about House Points, so I went ahead and told the professor you had a stomach ache and were with Abbott,” Eret informed him with a wink before leaning forward conspiratorially, “but we both know she’s probably too blind and batty to notice tardiness. She probably can’t even read the clock!”

George laughed along politely. He’d been so wrapped up in his own anxieties that he’d forgotten about the little changes to his seating arrangements that Wilbur had organized for him. Because the curly haired boy didn’t take Arithmancy with George and Dream, he’d subtly instructed Eret to take the Slytherin boy’s place so George could be spared the awkwardness of interacting with the blond. It was a very thoughtful gesture which George appreciated more than his friends could know, but it forced him to postpone the W.A.P. discussion indefinitely.

He sighed and glanced at Dream out of the corner of his eye. The Slytherin boy was seated next to one of the Ravenclaw girls in their year, looking quite bored and out of place. George would have expected Dream to sit either near Eric or GB80, both of whom were in the class, but the other two Slytherin boys were on the complete opposite side of the room. In fact, *all* of the fourth-year Slytherin Arithmancy students were seated as far away from Dream as physically possible.

George felt a twinge of worry in his chest. Something was off.

Before he could give it too much thought, however, Professor Vector told them to turn to page four hundred of their textbook. He quickly became absorbed in his problem sets, too busy to spare another look back at the blond.

It's alright, he told himself, *I'll talk to him during lunch.*

~~~~~

Dream was nowhere to be found during lunch.

His best friend had disappeared right after Arithmancy, ducking into the hallway and out of sight before George could even call out to him. He expected to find him conversing with his roommates at the Slytherin table or perhaps eating with the Hufflepuffs, but Dream was strangely absent from all of his usual spots in the Great Hall.

George tried to ignore the growing feeling of unease in his gut. Knowing his best friend’s location, even when they weren’t on the best of terms, always brought George a measure of peace; the fact that he hadn’t the *slightest* clue where Dream was left him feeling on edge, unable to focus on the conversation happening around him at the Ravenclaw table. His roommates noticed, of course, and



tried to ease his unease by cracking jokes and including him in their heated debate over Wilbur's next song title.

"Don't you think 'Sally Please Come Back I Miss You' is a little too...obvious?" Eret asked, their brows scrunching up in thought.

"It captures the essence of the song," Wilbur insisted, pulling his entire guitar out of his school bag, "Here, maybe another listen will help you understand."

"Yeah, understand why they haven't been workin on her," Techno rolled his eyes.

Wilbur squared his shoulders, deliberately ignoring the comment, "*Sally, please come back, I miss you, dear...*" he sang, the notes melancholy and the guitar strums poignant. "*Sally, please come back, I need you here...*"

"*Sally, run while you can, and disappear,*" Techno muttered, instantly being shushed by Eret.

"*How tall is he again, six foot five? I heard he knows how to drive...*"

Eret nudged George. "Is driving important to Muggles?"

"Er...I mean, it's a sign of independence," he answered. "I s'pose girls find it attractive."

Wilbur droned on. "*Sally, without you my heart is lost...I'd do anything, at any cost...Sally, please just give me a chance — your beauty has put me in a trance...*"

"Hey, uh, weren't *you* the one who left? Why're you askin' Sally to come back when *you're* the one who went off to boardin' school?" Techno interrupted, causing Wilbur to wince and hit a sharp note.

"Not— not everything is *literal*, Techno!" He scoffed, "You know nothing of true artistry! Her leaving is a metaphor for..."

Wil paused, biting his lip. Techno snorted. "For...?"

"For...for her leaving my heart!"

"You don't have a clue what a metaphor is, do you?"

"Of *course* I do! She left my heart in the dust, Techno, a-and found some...some *bastard* Muggle boy who doesn't even *care* about her!"

Eret perked up at their friend's words. "Wait, a Muggle boy? Is this the 'Jared' person you mentioned in your letter to me over the holidays?"

"Fuck Jared! I *hate* Jared! He's so tall and handsome and sexy and I hate him!"

George almost choked on his pasta, his face burning red. "T-*tall*?" he squeaked.

"And handsome and sexy, George, try to keep up," Eret snickered, rolling their eyes dramatically.

"It's not fair! What does he have that I don't?!" Wilbur wailed, slumping over the table.

"A girlfriend," Techno muttered under his breath, earning laughs from both Eret and George and another mournful wail from Wilbur.

The conversation was so random and funny that George almost forgot why he felt anxious.

Almost.

The momentary distraction didn't stop his eyes from scanning the cafeteria when he got up to go to his next class, searching for a familiar head of dirty blond hair.

The rest of his lessons seemed to drag on endlessly. In every class, one of his roommates always showed up early to reserve the seat next to George, leaving Dream to sit somewhere in a corner by himself. The sight filled George with something akin to guilt.

When each period ended, Dream was the first one out the door. It was impossible to get within five feet of him, let alone have a chat. It was very apparent that the Slytherin boy was avoiding him.

And why wouldn't he be avoiding him? Wasn't that precisely what George wanted? Hadn't *he* been the one to demand space, to impose this level of social distance?

He didn't have a right to feel frustrated. He knew that. But that fact didn't stop him from wishing Dream would turn around and listen, anyway.

It was shortly after six in the evening when George finally cornered him. He spotted Dream sneaking out of the Great Hall with an armful of bread rolls and a plate of something cheesy, making a beeline for the staircase down to the Slytherin dungeons. George knew that if he wanted to intercept Dream that night, he had to do it right then.

He took a deep breath and stepped out of the shadows, stepping directly in Dream's path and almost causing the blond to drop his dinner. Once the initial shock of seeing George passed, Dream's jaw dropped and cheeks reddened.

"*George!*" he exclaimed, glancing around them fervently. "Were you just...just *waiting* behind a pillar to jump scare me?!"

George crossed his arms in front of his chest. "Perhaps."

"That's weird! How long were you standing there?!"

"It doesn't matter," George replied dismissively, standing up a bit straighter and pinning Dream with his gaze. "I want to talk to you."

Dream straightened up as well, expression shifting into something more guarded. "I'm a bit busy," he said, sidestepping the Ravenclaw and resuming his walk down the hall. It took George's brain a few seconds to process the brusque brush-off, but once he *did*, he was pissed.

"Hey!" he called out after the other boy, jogging up to him and once again positioning himself in Dream's way. "Don't be an arse, Dream, I just want to talk."

Dream sighed. When his green eyes met George's own, they looked conflicted. "You wanted time. You wanted space. I'm giving you both of those things."

That little twinge of guilt was back, tugging painfully on his heartstrings and making him wince. "I know. And th-thank you, you've given me plenty, and I've done a bit of thinking, and, well...you don't have to avoid me anymore. I just want to talk."

Dream raised an eyebrow. "I'm avoiding you? I'm not the one who switched seats in every single class."

George grimaced. "I'm sorry about that, it was Wilbur's idea, but I'll tell him to stop. Anyway, that's beside the point." His shoulders sagged and he looked up at Dream longingly, letting all the pent up loneliness and emotional turmoil of the past few weeks seep into his voice as he said, "I miss you."

Dream's guarded expression faltered. For a moment, the twinge of guilt in George's heart disappeared and a flicker of hope took its place.

"I miss you, too," Dream confessed, his voice barely audible above the din from the nearby Great Hall. "So much."

"I hate rowing with you. It's exhausting,"

The tension between them eased, bringing George a sense of welcome relief. When Dream smiled tentatively, he felt like his heart would explode.

"So," George continued, "Can we have a conversation, now? We could head down to the Slytherin common room, if you'd like, or we could walk up to Ravenclaw..." he trailed off, letting Dream make the decision. After a moment's pause, the blond nodded towards the dungeons.

"My room. It's closer," he decided. George nodded and followed him down the stairs.

"I'm glad we can talk," he told Dream as they descended. "It's overdue."

"Yeah."

"I wanted to ask you about something I overheard a few girls chatting about outside of Arithmancy class."

Dream's shoulders tensed, but the blond kept walking, so George kept talking.

"They said something about you telling your father off," he continued. "And, well, I know better than to blindly trust rumors, especially when they come from gossipy Hogwarts girls, so I wanted to ask you personally if...if it was true."

Dream stopped in his tracks. "If what was true?" he asked through gritted teeth.

"If it's true that you're not going to work for your father anymore."

It was as if a switch had been flipped, the way Dream's demeanor went from open and relaxed to closed off and rigid in the span of a second. The mention of his father was enough to undo all of the progress they'd made towards initiating a dialogue. When Dream turned and their eyes met, George's heart dropped.

There, reflected clearly in the depths of Dream's green eyes, was internal conflict.

Dream looked torn.

"George, I—" he started, only to cut himself off with a groan.

"You-you don't have to answer right away!" George rushed to say, placing a placating hand on his friend's arm. "We can get settled in your common room, first. You can eat, and then we'll talk."

Dream shook his head. "No. No, we won't. We can't talk yet. I-I just— it's my turn to think, okay? I'm sorry, I just can't right now."

With those hurried excuses still tumbling from his lips, Dream turned on his heel and fled down the stairs. All George could do was stare in shock at his retreating figure and wonder what he did wrong.

Just like he had done dozens of times that day, Dream slipped away.

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George never returned to the Great Hall for dinner after Dream left.

Though his stomach growled in protest, he went straight upstairs to the Ravenclaw common room, eager to bury his head in his pillow and scream. Or cry. Or both. He needed some means of catharsis, some way to provide the slightest relief from the onslaught of confusing emotions that were muddling his thinking.

Never before had the Ravenclaw knocker seemed like such an annoyance. Its bronze head glared at him imposingly, the only thing standing between him and the welcome quiet of his dormitory. Three sharp knocks brought it to life.

“Where do thoughts go when they’ve been forgotten?”

Fuck.

“Uh...they sit in the back of your brain until you remember them again.”

The door didn’t budge. George had to restrain himself from trying to kick it down in irritation.

“Wow, what a loser.”

George turned around and breathed a sigh of relief upon seeing Techno at the top of the staircase, a plate of buttered pasta in his hands and an amused look on his face.

"Strugglin here?"

“Just do it,” George sighed, stepping aside to allow Techno a go at the riddle. The pink haired boy handed the plate of food to George before summoning the eagle’s mystical voice.

“Where do thoughts go when they’ve been forgotten?”

Techno paused, tilting his head in thought. After a few moments, he answered. “Forgotten thoughts don’t disappear, they just find new homes in the minds of those that welcome them. One person’s discarded thoughts are another mind’s treasure trove. In the meantime, though, the shadows of our thoughts keep livin’ in the deep recesses of our minds, waitin’ to be discovered again.”

The door swung open.

Techno walked through the threshold, pausing to look back at George questioningly. “Well? Need me t’ roll out a red carpet too?”

“Er, no, sorry.”

When they were both inside the common room, George tried to hand the plate of pasta back, only to be met with an amused shake of the head.

“The food’s for you. We’re not blind, y’know, don’t think we didn’t notice that you weren’t at dinner.”

Almost as if on cue, George's stomach growled. He thanked Technoblade sheepishly before digging into the pasta, groaning when the first bite passed through his lips. Wordlessly, the two roommates walked up the stairs to the boys' dormitory turrets, closing the door behind them when they were finally within the confines of their dorm room.

Techno sighed and collapsed onto his bed, rolling over to toss open his bedside drawer and pull out a roll of parchment. George watched from his desk as the pink haired boy summoned a pen from the other side of the room without even looking.

"Woah," he gasped, catching Techno's attention. "You can do wandless magic? When did you learn that?"

Techno shrugged. "I picked it up."

"You don't just 'pick up' wandless magic."

"It's not that hard, y'just needa not have a life so you've got time t' practice," the other boy snickered, "Y'never know when ya might need it."

They lapsed into comfortable silence, the only sounds filling the room were those of George chewing and the faint scratching of pen on parchment. When he was finished with his food, George pushed the plate away and leaned back in his chair comfortably.

"What are you writing?" he asked Techno, curious about what had his roommate so focused. Techno didn't look up from his work to answer.

"Some news," he muttered. The pen paused its scratching momentarily as Techno stopped to reread his work.

"News?"

"Mmm. News."

A pause. The continued *scratch scratch scratch* of the pen sounded faintly like a whisper to George's ears.

"What news?" he prodded.

Techno blinked up at him, the look in his eyes considering. Finally, he nodded to himself and pulled a crumpled wad of paper from his pocket, tossing it at George's head. The brunet fumbled with the thing as he pried it open, being extra careful not to allow the fragile paper to tear beneath his fingertips.

When its crinkles were smoothed out to the best of George's abilities, he squinted at the image and accompanying text printed on the paper. Like most of the papers passed between students as of late, the one in George's hands was torn from the *Daily Prophet*. A woman who he easily recognized as Technoblade's mother was pictured standing before a group of official-looking wizards and witches wearing long, formal robes, the official seal of the British Ministry of Magic displayed clearly in the background. Claire Technoblade's lips were moving as she gave what was presumably a speech.

"Your mum's in the news a lot," George remarked.

Techno snorted, "Woah, really? I had no clue, I was just lookin at the broom catalogue."

George flushed and looked back down at the paper, noticing upon closer scrutiny that several words and phrases in the article beneath the image were underlined in red. “Why’ve you made notes on this page?”

“The real question is why haven't you read any of 'em before askin me.”

George pursed his lips, skimming the fine print, absorbing information with the practiced speed of a straight O student.

The article was about a speech Claire Technoblade had apparently given at a public forum regarding a proposal to increase Ministry-provided funding to the W.A.P. As George read further down the paper, something became glaringly apparent about the way the article was written, and he quickly realized why Techno had underlined certain phrases.

“They write about her like she’s stupid,” George said, meeting Techno’s gaze across the room. “Like she’s clueless.”

“Like she’s ignorant,” Techno agreed, nodding solemnly. “Divertin’ the focus. Takin’ attention away from the words themselves and instead narrowin’ in on *how* they’re bein’ said.”

George’s fingertips traced the underlined passages as if committing them to memory.

The wartime widow, who is a Muggle herself, spoke before the committee on Thursday and accused Clay Selwyn II, the W.A.P.'s head spagyric, of being a “wizard scientist who has taken it upon himself to assign value to non-magical lives.” She also urged committee members to “judge all people on the basis of their characters, and not by their abilities to make broomsticks fly or perform levitation jinxes.” The speech, while applauded by some as courageous, was criticized by others for viewing magical issues through a Muggle lens.

“I think her arguments are a bit rubbish,” one Ministry official told reporters. “Why should we be taking advice on important political issues from someone who cannot even distinguish between a charm and a jinx? Leave magical affairs to the magical, I say.”

George’s gut churned in disgust at what he was reading. “It’s so...*wrong*, ” he said helplessly.

“She’s sayin’ important stuff, but she didn’t grow up with magic, so of course terms like ‘spagyric’ aren’t gonna come naturally to her. How’s she supposed to know the difference between a charm and a jinx?” Techno spat. “And moreover, why should it even matter?”

“It shouldn’t,” George murmured. Techno picked his pen back up and pressed its ballpoint tip to the parchment once more.

“No. It shouldn’t. And why can’t these people *ever* refer to her without mentioning my dad? Didja ever notice that it’s never just ‘Claire Technoblade?’ No, it’s always gotta be ‘Claire Technoblade, wartime widow.’”

“So...is that the news you’re writing about? You’re telling someone about your mother?”

Techno’s lip twitched. “I’m writing *to* my mother, actually.”

“Oh?” George sat up straighter in his seat. “You’re writing to her about the article?”

“Mmm,” Techno hummed, “Givin’ her suggestions. Insight. Tip-offs.” He paused to look up at George. “Relayin’ rumors.”

Something about the way Techno said the words with a knowing look in his eye made George's skin prickle.

"Techno," he said quietly, the atmosphere in their room filling with an unnameable sort of tension. "What's happening?"

Technoblade turned to look out the window. Their room's lighting cast him in shadows, making him appear mysterious. Dangerous. When he spoke, it was with a wisdom uncharacteristic of a fourteen-year-old boy.

"History, George. History is unfoldin' around us, every passin' second of every day."

George believed it.

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Dream almost never willingly spent time in the library. That was why, when George spotted the blond hunched over at a table in the corner on a sunny March afternoon, he nearly dropped the books he was holding in surprise.

A few things immediately struck George about Dream's appearance, the most obvious of which was that he looked tired. From his position near the library's entrance, George could see that the boy had dark circles etched underneath his eyes and that he appeared to be barely holding himself upright. Various books and papers were spread out messily before him.

In short, Dream looked terrible. It hurt George to see.

Perhaps it was in poor taste for him to approach Dream when the Slytherin was in such a sorry state, but George's feet carried him towards the blond of their own volition. Weeks of awkward silences and furtive glances exchanged in hallways had taken their toll on the Ravenclaw to the point where he just couldn't bring himself to care about common courtesy.

When it came to Dream, common courtesy flew out the window, anyway.

The Slytherin didn't even look up at the sound of approaching footsteps — George had to clear his throat to get Dream to notice him, and even then, the blond's gaze was unfocused. Green eyes blinked up at him dazedly.

"...George?" he rasped, slumping down in his seat upon realizing who was in front of him.

"Hey." George didn't ask for permission before pulling up a chair. "You look awful."

Dream's response to that was a delayed scoff. "So you came over here to insult me, Gogi?"

"No. I came over here to talk some sense into you."

A raised eyebrow. "I told you, I needed to—"

"Oh, stop it, Dream. You've had plenty of time to think. It's time to talk. What are you doing in the library? Why do you look so horrible, and why did you run away from me after telling me that you missed me?"

The corners of Dream's lips turned downwards in a small frown. He glanced at the papers spread out before him, a faint look of surprise crossing his face at the disarray. His hand reached out to straighten the clutter but stopped in midair, Dream apparently giving up on restoring any semblance of order to his workspace.

"Do you want me to answer all those questions, or...?"

George rolled his eyes. "Of course I want you to answer them, idiot. I don't just ask questions for fun."

Dream abruptly chuckled. "That is such crap. You ask ten million questions a day, you Raven-nerd."

*Do not fall for his teasing. Do not let him avoid this discussion. You, George, are a man on a mission.*

George leveled the other boy with a serious stare. Sensing that George was not in the mood to reciprocate his friendly banter, Dream sighed.

"Alright."

"Alright?"

"I'll—" the blond cut himself off with a yawn, "—bite. Whaddya wanna talk about first?"

George wet his lips nervously. He didn't miss the way Dream followed the motion with his eyes.

"The rumors," he decided. "Are they true?"

Instead of a verbal response, Dream nudged a piece of parchment across the table. George gingerly picked it up and allowed his eyes to scan the words.

And almost fell out of his seat.

It was a letter. A letter addressed to Dream's own father, from Dream.

"Wh—? When...? You actually— *Dream*," he sputtered, turning the letter over in his hands. Skimming over the words, he half thought he was seeing things. But no: right there on paper, printed in Dream's barely legible chicken scratch, were the words George had been longing to hear his best friend say for *years*.

*I quit. I'm done with the W.A.P. and everything it stands for.*

*You're not trying to "cure" anything, you're just trying to tell the world that a life without magic isn't worth living, and that's just not true.*

George couldn't even begin to describe the onslaught of emotions that hit him in that moment.

There was surprise, yes, but it was laced with an undercurrent of relief. He felt like a weight he hadn't known he'd been carrying was lifted off his shoulders. Like there'd been an invisible barrier between the two of them which had only just been shattered.

And underneath it all, thrumming steadily to the beat of George's heart, was what he could only label as unadulterated affection.

He blinked, and Dream was in his arms.



“Oof,” the blond grunted in surprise, tentatively returning the hug after a few moments.  
“George...?”

“I’m so *proud* of you,” George breathed, voice muffled by the fabric of his friend’s robes.

Dream didn’t seem to know what to say. “Um, well, there’s not much to be proud of—”

George cut his friend off by tightening his arms around the other boy’s waist. “Shut up, idiot,” he commanded sternly, silencing Dream’s protest by pulling back slightly to look the Slytherin in the eyes. “This letter took *courage*, Dream. I’m proud of you for standing up to him.”

Dream stiffened and averted his eyes, presumably shying away from the praise. George smiled at his best friend’s embarrassment but didn’t take his words back; Dream *deserved* to hear them.

“No, George, you don’t get it. I’m not—”

“You *are*. You’re braver than all the Gryffindors combined. *This*,” George pointed at the letter emphatically, “is incredible. I can’t believe you told him you’re ashamed to be his son!” George threw his head back and laughed. “When did you even *write* this?”

Dream looked pained.

*Odd. He’s not usually the bashful type.*

“On the train,” Dream said finally, rubbing his temples.

“The train here? When you didn’t sit with us in our compartment?”

Dream nodded and fiddled with his fingers. George frowned, recognizing the movement as one of his friend’s telltale nervous habits.

“Dream,” he said softly, placing his hand over Dream’s and giving it a comforting squeeze, “I know it must be frightening to stand up to your family. But you don’t need their approval! My parents would be happy to have you stay over spring and summer break. You can sleep in the spare room downstairs, you can come to work with me, we’ll stay as far away from your parents as we can—”

“I’m not quitting.”

George froze. When Dream didn’t say anything else, he withdrew his hand.

“What do you mean?”

Dream’s gaze was directed downwards at something on the table. George followed it until his eyes landed on another piece of parchment, this one crisply folded and stamped with a broken green seal.

He didn’t ask for permission before picking the letter up, but Dream didn’t protest. George shakily read the address line, then the first paragraph. Then the second. By the time his eyes reached the bottom of the paper, he was trembling.

*She is afflicted with the disease... will never experience the joys of attending Hogwarts ...  
biological fluke ...*

“Please understand, George—”

“Did you not mean *any* of what you wrote in that letter?”

George blinked back tears and took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. Dream ran a hand through his dirty blond hair.

“I did — *do* — mean it, George, I swear. But...it’s *Drista*.”

There was such anguish in Dream’s voice that George *almost* reached out to hug him again. But he didn’t.

Because George was angry. More than angry, George was *disappointed*.

“Where is your conviction, Dream?” he demanded. “Did someone else write that letter for you?”

“No!”

“Then explain to me how the person sitting in front of me right now is the same person who told his dad that he — what was it, again? — that he doesn’t even ‘want the same stupid name’ as him.” George knew he should lower his voice lest Madame Pince kick them out of the library, but the betrayal coursing through his veins was making it difficult to control his volume.

“Because Drista wasn’t involved before!” Dream whisper-yelled in frustration. “You don’t get it because you’re an only child, but this makes things different for me, okay?”

George narrowed his eyes indignantly. “Oh, I don’t *get* it? What do I not get, what it’s like to have non-magical family members?” he asked, tone laced with sarcasm. “Because that’s been my whole *life*, Dream, and there’s nothing wrong with it!”

“I didn’t say there was anything wrong with it. But your parents were *always* non-magical, and Drista grew up thinking she was going to be the most powerful witch in the world! And I *promised* her that she would be, and I *promised* her that I’d teach her how to play quidditch and that I’d teach her all the coolest prank spells and...a-and I can’t go back on my word, Gogi!”

“Don’t ‘Gogi’ me.”

“Fine. I can’t go back on my word, *George*. ”

George pinched the bridge of his nose in irritation. Dream’s tenacity and loyalty were two of his most admirable qualities, but they were character traits that blinded him from seeing the bigger picture. Trying to point out Selwyn’s obvious manipulation tactics was going to be like trying to push a heavy boulder up a steep hill: it was going to be an arduous task for which George simply did not have the energy.

Dream was going to be stubborn, and George was going to lose him.

And it was going to break George’s heart.

To his credit, Dream *did* look apologetic. The blond’s eyes were brimming with unshed tears, imploring George to understand his predicament.

“I can’t believe you,” George muttered, feeling his own face grow hot. “I thought you would be better.”

“This doesn’t have to change anything,” Dream pleaded. “I still can’t stand my dad. I still think all of this pureblood supremacy shit is fucked up, and I’ll *still* fight against human testing. I’ll just do

it from the inside.”

George shook his head. “But you’ll still be involved.”

“In a *good* way! I just want my sister to be able to have magic, George, and I don’t think that makes me a bad person!”

“That’s like saying you’ll become one of Hitler’s henchmen even though you don’t support the Nazis! It doesn’t make sense!”

“...What’s a Nazi?”

George threw his hands up in defeat. “Forget it! Forget it. I don’t know why I expected better of you. Techno was right — you’re a little spoiled pureblood boy who will *never* understand the consequences of his family’s actions.”

With those angry words, George turned on his heel and marched out of the library. He didn’t look back as he walked away.

If he had, he would have seen Dream’s face crumple and his shoulders shake in a violent sob.

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The morning before the students of Hogwarts were due to depart for their spring holidays, Tommy woke Tubbo up and forced the shorter boy to sit down with him at a table in the Hufflepuff common room.

“Alright, Tubbo, here’s the plan.”

Tommy pointed to a picture in their Charms textbook with his index finger. From across the table, Tubbo yawned.

“You’ve said the plan six times already. When will we actually *do* the charm?”

“We’ll only have one chance to get this right, Big T. Practice makes perfect, right? So let’s practice s’ more.” The Gryffindor boy cleared his throat and pulled his wand out of his pocket. “Mr. Philza Magic said the magic word is ‘*Colovaria*’, alright? Make sure we’re thinking of the *same colour* and do not — hoh for the love of— do not fuck it up, Tubbo. If this doesn’t work I’ll... I will be so angry and this time I have *spells* to help me throw shit.”

“Is it ‘co-loh-VA-ree-ah’ or ‘co-loh-va-REE-ah?’” Tubbo asked, ignoring the threats.

Tommy opened his mouth to answer, but was interrupted by a loud voice on the other side of the Hufflepuff common room.

“Toby! What did I say about visitors?”

The two first-years exchanged glances as Bad walked up to them, arms crossed in front of his chest. He gave both of the boys a stern look and pointed to the shiny prefect badge pinned to the yellow lining of his robes.

“It’s like you muffinheads don’t even care what I say!” he huffed. “Since you apparently forgot,

I'm a Hufflepuff *prefect*. That means I'm an authority figure and you have to listen to me! I'm already bending the rules by letting you hang out here, Tommy, but I *mean it* when I say you can't be in this common room before eight in the morning!"

Tommy pursed his lips, holding back a swear-filled retort and instead putting on his best innocent-looking face. "I am so sorry, Mr. Halo, really. It's all my fault. Don't blame Tubbo for this, please, he was just being a good friend and helping me study for a *massive* test we have today! You know Tubbo — practically a Charms master, he is, isn't he? Come on now, tell 'im, Tubbo, don't be shy — he's a right genius when it comes to Charmery, Mr. Halo."

Bad's look softened as Tubbo nodded dutifully, pointing at the Charms textbook in front of them as evidence.

Seizing the opportunity to get more words in, Tommy continued to ramble. "And y'know, Bad, I don't come from a magic family like you lot, I've really got a handicap when it comes to this stuff," he sniffled dramatically. "I'm so used to learning *normal* stuff like maths and English and Biology that I'm afraid I might start *failing* here! Do you know what my mum will do to me if I fail?! Oh sh — oh god, I might start crying now, you've gone and made me *cry*, Bad! I don't want to fail, please, I've been practicin' as well as I can but it's just so *hard*!"

Tommy buried his face in his hands, channeling his acting spirit as best as he could into the fake sobs while Tubbo rummaged through his robes for a tissue.

"Oh, Tommy, no, don't cry!" Bad exclaimed, leaning down to pat his shoulder comfortingly, "It's okay, you're not gonna fail! You're a really smart kid!"

"But the hat didn't even put me in Ravenwing!" Tommy wailed, throwing himself at Tubbo to hide the fact that there weren't any actual tears streaming down his face. "You can't make me go back to my room! I'll fail if Tubbo doesn't help me!"

"Uh, it's called Ravenclaw—" Bad began, only to be cut off by another fake sob.

"See! I can't even remember the names! All this magic is hurting my head, I can't do this, I am going to leave the school and never come back!"

"He really does need the help, Bad." Tubbo added, patting Tommy's back, "I've been trying to help him with this charm for hours and he's not getting it. I can't leave a friend in need behind, right? That would just make me a bad person."

Bad looked at the two first-years helplessly before sighing in defeat, "Okay, alright, I'm sorry, just please don't cry, Tommy! You can stay here for now but this is a *one time exception*, okay?!"

"Yes! Thank you, Mr. Halo, you will not regret this decision, I promise." Tommy exclaimed, leaping to his feet to shake Bad's hand. "From now on, I won't be in this common room before seven. I'll follow all the rules because I really respect you, you're the second best authority figure in the school!"

Bad blinked in surprise at the sudden change in attitude as Tommy ushered him back to his room. "Hey, wait, what do you mean sev— hold on, second best? Who's first?!"

"We're so sorry for disrupting you, Mr. Halo, we'll keep it down." Tubbo waved to him as Tommy pushed him back towards the dorms. "Goodbye!"

Bad opened his mouth only to immediately close it again and shake his head, "Yes, please. Good luck on your test."

"Thank you!" Tommy beamed, watching as Bad dragged his feet back to his dorm room. When they finally heard a door click shut, the duo sighed in relief.

"I think that was a sign from Wizard-God that we are ready." Tommy decided.

"Does that mean I get to sleep now?" Tubbo asked, slamming the charms textbook shut.

"Of course not! We've got to get into position before Wilbur and his friends get there!"

"Right, right," Tubbo nodded, rising to his feet, "I'll just go... brush my teeth and I'll meet you there, yeah?"

Tommy groaned, "*Fine*, but make it quick! I can't wait to see the look on his face when— hoh it will be so funny. He'll be like 'Change it back!' and we'll go 'Not until you say we're the best wizards ever!' and he'll go 'No! No! I can't! I'm Wilbur Soot and my pride is fragile!' And then we'll say 'Then your hair is *never* going back to normal!' and then he'll cry— Tubbo it's going to be the best prank ever."

The monologue was met with the sound of another door slamming shut, Tubbo having already disappeared down the hall.

"Well, alright then." Tommy huffed, waving his wand in front of him to practice the wand movement. He focused on the nearest small object, which happened to be one of the stupid quills wizards used to write instead of pens, and aimed the tip of his wand directly at it. "*Colovaria*," he declared, watching with a combination of fascination and pride as the quill shifted from gray to blue before his eyes.

It was a while before Tubbo reemerged from his dorm. Tommy beckoned the Hufflepuff impatiently, gesturing towards the common room exit.

"You remember where to stand, yeah?" he asked for the umpteenth time. Tubbo nodded.

"Yeah, yeah, in the secret hole in the wall behind the tapestry, next to the Ravenclaw common room." He waved him off, "But are you *sure* we have to go up all those stairs to do it? Can't we just get him in the dining hall, or next time we see him on the train, or when he gets to the bottom of the stairs—"

"No, no, shut up, that's..." Tommy trailed off, not wanting to admit that Tubbo's words did make a bit of sense, "Actually... No, that's stupid. That's not even— that makes no sense! No, my plan is smart, he will be caught by surprise up there, it would be so obvious to just do it from where you— why would you even say that!"

Tubbo held his hands up in surrender, "Alright, okay, sorry! Bad plan!"

"Yeah, it *was* a bad... yeah."

They slowly made their way up the countless flights of stairs, pausing several times along the way to catch their breath. The urge to start spouting complaints and profanities kept itching at Tommy's brain, but he held himself not wanting Tubbo to know that he was starting to agree with his earlier suggestion more and more by the second.

When they finally reached the top of Ravenclaw Tower, Tommy had never felt so much respect for Wilbur in his entire life for having to make that trek every day.

"Give me a minute," Tubbo huffed, clutching a stitch in his abdomen and gulping down breaths of

air. Tommy was about to make fun of his friend's lack of stamina when he suddenly heard voices coming up the stairs.

"Oh sh— quick! hide!" he whispered urgently, shoving Tubbo through the tapestry hung next to the infamous eagle knocker. The Hufflepuff fell through with a grunt and shot Tommy a sharp glare once both of them were safely hidden in the shadows.

"You're so—"

"*Shhhhh!*"

The voices were drawing nearer. Tommy's eyes snapped away from tubbo when he was able to make out snippets of conversation.

"—you sure? It's been *months*. He hasn't said *anything* to you about it?"

The Gryffindor recognized the voice as belonging to Dream, the Slytherin fourth-year who was *definitely* dating George. The answering voice, however, was much more exciting to him.

"No, sorry mate. He hasn't come out of our room all morning."

"Nothing? Not a *word*?"

Tommy and Tubbo exchanged a glance. Slowly and carefully, Tommy withdrew his wand and mimed casting a spell. Tubbo nodded and pulled his own out of his pocket.

"Hold on a minute, I have to fetch Techno. He and I are taking Friend to see Madame Abbott. The poor creature's feathers have been falling out and I've no clue why."

From their hiding spot, the two first-years heard Dream sigh.

"I'll just go back downstairs, then. That stupid bird hates me."

The boys held their breaths and listened as Dream descended the stone staircase. Soon after the sounds of his footsteps faded, they heard Wilbur activate the eagle knocker and answer some convoluted riddle before the common room door slammed shut with a *thud*.

Tubbo tugged on Tommy's sleeve. "Hey, Tommy?" he whispered, eyes widening in the dark, "Isn't that the one bird they trained to attack you?"

Tommy felt a twinge of phantom pains at the mere mention of the demonic owl. "Of— pff— of course not, Big T! Why would you— no! That's— even if it *was*, it wouldn't dare touch me now. It knows I'm a real man, y'see, if it even looks at me it'll just fuckin... shit its pants!"

Tubbo gave him an unimpressed look, "Are you sure? It sounds like it's still committing crimes against Dream, to me."

"I don't see what you're getting at, Tubster. That man is irrelevant."

"But he's still being attacked!" Tubbo exclaimed. "Dream seems pretty manly to me, and *he* just said the bird still hates him."

"Tubbo." Tommy turned to his friend, a serious expression on his face. "Dream is not a man. He's the biggest bitch— the most massive *pussy* in the whole entire wizard world."

"Why'd you say that?"

Tommy thought back to the time months prior when he'd caught Dream and George on a secret date in the library. The two were obviously involved in a top-secret romance — Tommy had seen them both go bright red at just the mention of them being a couple, after all. They were *definitely* dating, but clearly didn't want anyone to know about it, and while Tommy thought hiding one's undying love was incredibly cowardly — if one is in love, one must shout it to the world! — but he would respect the couple's wishes and keep their secret.

Focusing his attention back on Tubbo, he rolled his eyes. "Because I can sense it! I need to know who's a little bitch so I can avoid them and not get infected with pussy-itis. It's a terrible disease for Big Men like me— but *anyways*, my point is that OBVIOUSLY the bird would attack Dream, he's a... a fuckin beta male, he is! I'm an *alpha male*, Tubbo, AND I can use magic now. That bird would fuckin piss itself if it came within a five foot radius of me."

Tubbo opened his mouth to offer a retort but was cut off when the door to the Ravenclaw common room opened and two voices carried into the corridor. Tommy's ears perked up — he knew those particular voices quite well.

"He looks normal to me."

"Techno, are you *blind*?! Friend has lost three feathers already this morning! Something is terribly wrong!"

"Don't birds shed?"

"You're thinking of dogs and cats. Owls don't shed."

"Nah, I'm pretty sure birds shed, too. Isn't that what molting is?"

Tommy rolled his eyes. Of course they were talking about nerd shit. That's all Techno and Wilbur ever talked about, which was probably why they were in stupid Ravenwing.

"Techno's right," Tubbo whispered. "Birds molt once a year, usually in the late spring or summer."

The blond boy would've groaned if he wasn't trying to be quiet. Sometimes it felt like Tubbo should have been put in Ravenwing, too. Or even Slytherin. The guy could be quite diabolical when he wanted to be.

"Duck your head out — *quickly, now* — and tell me what you see," Tommy instructed. Tubbo quickly did as he was told, poking his head out of the tapestry and turning in the direction of the Ravenclaws' voices. After a few seconds, the Hufflepuff yanked his head back into the shadows.

"Well?" Tommy urged.

"The owl's in a cage! The beast has been shackled!" Tubbo answered, voice *just* shy of too loud.

The Gryffindor nodded, his expression settling into one of determination. "Then you know what we must do, Tubbo. Remember the plan."

Tubbo nodded at him, serious expression fixed on his face. In unison, the two boys threw the tapestry open and sprinted down the stairs, making their footsteps as light as possible so as to take their targets by surprise. Wilbur and Techno were just stepping onto the sixth-floor landing when the two first-years caught up to them.

"Now!" Tommy yelled, drawing his wand and aiming it at Wilbur's head. Tubbo copied the motion and began to count out loud.

“One! Two!”

A look of mild alarm crossed Techno’s usually stoic face. “What are you two—”

“*THREE! COLOVARIA!*”

A few things happened simultaneously.

As soon as the spell left the boys’ lips, two bright blue bolts of light burst from their wand tips in a straight line towards Wilbur’s head. Techno seemed to have processed this with a superhuman level of speed and reflexively whipped out his wand in response, casting *Expelliarmus* in the direction of the first-years in the blink of an eye.

Unfortunately, at that very moment Wilbur happened to stagger backwards, resulting in him knocking into Techno and causing the disarming charm to ricochet off the banister and fly right back towards the cage. The spell’s momentum broke the cage’s metal lock, sending the little door swinging open and enabling a very frazzled Friend to escape.

In the millisecond before the color change charm made contact with Wilbur’s head, Friend let out an angry screech and dove towards Tommy’s blond hair. The owl’s change in direction put it directly in the spells’ path. All four boys watched in horror as the two bright blue flashes hit it squarely on its breast.

There was a loud squawk. Friend dropped to the floor like a stone.

A moment’s pause. Then, all hell broke loose.

“FRIEND! NO!” Wilbur cried, distraught and terrified for his feathered companion. The Ravenclaw dropped to his knees and picked up the bird like one would an infant, cradling its head in his arms. As the curly haired boy scanned his pet for injuries, Techno whirled around to face the two first-years.

“What in Merlin’s name was *that*?” he demanded, pointing an accusatory finger at Tommy. “Really? You two idiots *had* to go for the hair? What is it with people ‘round here and dyein’ hair as a prank?!”

The two first-years, for lack of a better response, shrugged.

“And *really*—” Technoblade continued, shaking his head. “You two should know that the only thin’ that works in this world, is to treat others the way they treat you. I don’t like to think of myself as a violent person, but it looks like I thought wrong.”

Tommy and Tubbo began to back away nervously. “Uh, Techno?” Tommy asked with a timid smile, “Why are you pointing your wand at us like that?”

From his spot on the floor, Wilbur sobbed and held up a blue feather. “Friend is *blue*, Techno! And I can’t reverse it! Why can’t I reverse it?!”

Techno kept his eyes glued on Tommy as he answered Wil’s question. “These idiots said the charm two different ways. It’s ‘co-loh-VA-ree-ah,’ not ‘co-loh-va-REE-ah.’ You’re gonna need a master to reverse that one.”

Tommy shot a glare at Tubbo. “I *told* you it was ‘co-loh-VA-ree-ah’—”

“It’s not my fault I’m dyslexic!”

“What does that even have to do with—?”

“*Ahem.*” Techno cleared his throat and took a menacing step towards the two younger boys. “I’m feelin’ generous, so I’m gonna give you two a head start. You have ten seconds.”

“Ten seconds to do what?”

“*Ten.*”

“We’re not running from you!” Tommy shouted indignantly. “We’re not *pussies*. Tubbo— wait, Tubbo, where are you going?!”

“*Nine.*”

Tommy’s palms began to sweat. Wilbur brushed a tear away from his face dramatically and wailed at Techno. “Make them pay, Techno. Make them bloody sorry!”

Techno smirked. “Eight. I’d start runnin’ if I were you.”

“I’m not going to—”

“Seven.” he took a final step towards Tommy, cracking his neck.

With that, Tommy turned away and sprinted down the stairs.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are what keep this fic alive! I'm talking to you! Yes, you! The one who feels too shy to let us know how they felt while reading this!

Follow me (Ken) on Twitter for updates/random thoughts/art requests.

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Bonus thought: you ever just like, see all these people streaming on Twitch and think "wow I wanna do that it looks so fun" but then also think "nah I'm too socially anxious and everyone would make fun of me" ?? sometimes I'm just sittin playin minecraft thinkin "what if I just like streamed this and people could come hang out and chill and be friends" but then I remember I'm not a Gryffindor lolllll

if ur reading this ur a nerd and i love u

Chapter Twenty-Six || Year Four

Chapter Summary

Dream's fourth year comes to a close.

Chapter Notes

.....hi!

dodges rotten tomatoes

Sorry about the hiatus! For those of you who are unaware, there have been some authorial changes and I've been really busy these past few months. Check out my [TwitLonger](#) for the explanation.

Please welcome Sophia AKA SpiderSpawn to the LM team! I am way too busy to do this by myself and she carried this chapter so give her some love!

Also: we have a spin-off?! BetweenDisorders wrote an angsty piece based on Ranboo from this fic and it's amazing. Check it out [here](#).

Anyway! FAN ART TIME! Please check out:

[THIS](#) absolutely fan-fucking-tastic drawing of the boys on the train by Maki! It's finished! It's beautiful! Please click!

[These](#) chapter 25 doodles by imapiratematey

[This](#) adorable drawing of Wilbur clutching Friend by catsyesindeed

[These](#) doodles which aren't exactly fanart but hey I think they're cute so they go here :3

[This](#) epic drawing of sad boi Dream by Toffee! So pog!

[This](#) representation of how imapiratematey feels when they read these chapters

[These](#) DSMP Hogwarts doodles by kayio! They're so cute! ft. epic Techno quote

[These](#) drawings of Gog and Dre by PurpleAce!

[Another](#) doodle by catsyesindeed (Ink, are you just one of this fic's illustrators at this point?)

[This](#) image of Dre making fun of a typo in the draft. thanks, catsyesindeed

If I missed you, yell at me on Twitter! If you make fan art remember to tag us!!!

Enjoy the chapter!

TW: minor child abuse, mild homophobia, sexism

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

To anyone passing by on a rainy afternoon in April, the little, nondescript house in the Nottingham

suburb of Beeston looked entirely uninteresting. One of countless cookie-cutter two-storey brick structures in an ordinary Muggle neighborhood.

Inside the house, however, two wizards were forming a plan.

“Hmmm — instant darkness powder, you say?” one said to the other, turning a package over in his hands. “How dark?”

The other wizard rolled his eyes. “Very dark. Impenetrable. So dark the shopkeeper didn’t want to sell it to me. Of course, I can be *very* persuasive when I want to be.”

A shudder ran down the first wizard's spine. He knew the others 'persuasion' methods all too well. “What if the targets cast *Lumos*?”

“Pfft. *Lumos*? This stuff’s too powerful for any common charm like that.”

The first wizard narrowed his eyes in thought. If the plan were to succeed — which it *had* to, because they wouldn’t get a second chance if they failed — they would need absolute darkness.

“The box says it’s Peruvian,” he muttered, eyes skimming the label. “I don’t know shite about Peru.”

“Of course you don’t. You’ve never left England.”

“Hey. I’ve been to Scotland and Wales. *And* the magical part of Belfast.”

“Fine. You’ve never left the *United Kingdom*. ”

“Can we get back to discussing the plan?” the first wizard tsked impatiently, placing the box back down on the table in front of him. “Technoblade is smart, you know; I've heard he’s one of the best in his year. He’ll be there with his mum, but hopefully we won't run into her before we can hatch our plan. This will be difficult without the element of surprise.”

“We have the darkness powder, we spent *hours* learning the bedazzling hex, *and* we have the Decoy Detonators. What more surprises do you need?”

“We need all the surprises we can get if we want to take out *the* Technoblade.” the first wizard grinned wickedly, withdrawing his hand from his pocket and revealing a small explosive. He watched in delight as the sight of the object made his partner's eyes bulge comically.

"That— are you insane?!" the second wizard spluttered, "That's going to be impossible to stop! *We* might not even make it out of there!"

"Oh, you worry too much. Once we get in there and set this off, those two won't be a problem for us anymore. In fact, all *we'll* have to do is leave and let it do the job for us."

The other wizard stayed silent, staring at the explosive as though it would detonate if he dared to look away for even a second. "I..."

"Don't tell me you're backing out now!" the first wizard scoffed. "What happened to you?! Are you actually *sympathizing* with *Technoblade*?!"

"No! No, of course not!" he said earnestly, removing his eyes from the catalyst to look up at him with a purposeful expression "I'm in."

The first wizard tucked the explosive back in his pocket. “Good.”

They exchanged stoic nods and marched towards a brick fireplace, large enough to fit an adult man in its hearth.

When the first wizard withdrew his wand, the other stopped him.

“Let me do it,” he muttered, confidently waving his wand over both their bodies. “*Dissimulatio*.”

The charm took effect instantly. The two watched their own bodies fade into the background of their surroundings, becoming mere outlines.

“Bloody hell,” the taller wizard exclaimed. “It’s like a worse disillusionment charm.”

“Hey,” his companion snapped, tucking his wand away. “Most of the work’s gonna be done in the dark, anyways. It doesn’t need to be perfect.”

The first wizard shrugged and reached for a pinch of the green powder that was inside a pot on the mantel. Without further hesitation, he threw the substance into the flames, watching with satisfaction as the fire took on an emerald hue.

“You remember the name of the place, don’t you?” the first wizard questioned, stepping into the fire.

“Of course I do, it’s Blade Dwelling.” the second wizard responded confidently, then added “Isn’t it?”

“It’s *Blade Abode*, you idiot.” he said, elongating his words so he couldn’t be misunderstood.

“Well why’d you ask me if you already knew the answer?”

“I was testing you.”

“Well that’s just fucking stupid.”

“Blade Abode!”

The taller wizard blinked, and the outline of his companion had been whisked away.

He hastily took a handful of green powder and stepped into the flames, anxious to follow. The serpentine embers tickled his exposed skin wherever they landed.

“Blade Abode!” he recited confidently. And before he knew it, he was spinning out one living room and into another.

The first thing he noticed about the room into which he emerged was that it was dimly lit. He didn’t get the chance to make any further observations, however, because a split-second later his partner was pulling him out of the fireplace and ushering him into a crouched position behind a large sofa.

When he opened his mouth to ask a question, his companion slapped a hand over his mouth. It was then that the second wizard heard voices coming from somewhere just beyond their hiding spot and realized that they weren’t alone.

Eyes widening in alarm, the taller wizard reached into his pocket for the Peruvian darkness powder. Before he could cast the room in impenetrable darkness, however, the other wizard shook his head.

What? the taller wizard mouthed, taken aback by his companion's seeming reluctant to act. Crouching behind furniture like sitting ducks was not part of the plan!

But the first wizard was adamant. He felt the other's hand grab his wrist, stopping him from any further action. *Listen!* he mouthed back.

So the first wizard did. And then almost gave away their location when he gasped in recognition at the sound of the voices.

"You know what this means, don't you, Claire?"

The two wizards looked at one another in surprise. They knew that voice. It was not the voice of a person they planned on seeing that day, and if they were to be caught, the two wizards would be in *big* trouble.

"Of course I do," another voice snapped, female this time. "It means we're running out of time."

The taller wizard pursed his lips. While he had truly no context on what they were overhearing, it sounded important. However, they hadn't come all this way to eavesdrop. They were on a mission.

Slowly and deliberately, he tried to reach for the black powder again. This time, his friend didn't stop him, releasing his hand and readying himself.

"Don't be a pussy," he whispered, before casting the room into complete and total darkness.

The absolute absence of light was jarring. For several seconds, there was utter silence. The only sounds filling the room were those of stuttered breathing.

The two wizards wordlessly scurried around opposite sides of the couch, feeling their way through the darkness on their hands and knees. They made it about a meter before the room's other occupants burst into action.

"Claire, get behind me! Show yourself, coward!" commanded the male voice. "*LUMOS MAXIMA!*"

The darkness remained, immune to the light the man was attempting to create. The taller wizard smiled to himself, enjoying the chaos.

"What's happening?" the female voice asked, a note of panic coloring her tone.

"I can't cast the bloody light charm! *LUMOS! LUMOS MAXIMA!*"

A crash sounded from across the room, followed by a shriek. "What was that?!" the woman exclaimed. "Who's there?!"

"*Shit,*" the first wizard heard his companion whisper.

Suddenly, the sounds of hurried footsteps could be heard coming from multiple directions. It was then that both wizards realized their mission was rapidly becoming unfeasible. In a moment of panic, the taller wizard withdrew a decoy detonator from his pocket.

"Now!" he hissed, tossing the object as far away from himself as he could. His companion did the same. There was a tense moment of anticipatory silence before the detonators went off, filling the room with the sounds of ear-piercing screeches.

"What *is* that, Phil?"

“I don’t kn— *who’s there?! Show yourselves now! Or by Merlin's word I’ll hex you to smithereens!*”

The first wizard swallowed nervously, real panic setting in upon hearing the true extent of Philza’s fury.

“We need to go!” he whispered. “We *really* can’t let Philza fuckin’ Magic see us!”

He felt his companion clasp his arm in the darkness.

“I *know*! Quick, where’s the floo powder?”

“What?”

His friend’s grip on his arm tightened.

“The floo powder! The shit we used to get here in the first place!”

“I know what fucking floo powder is! Why would I bring it?!”

“To get *back*!”

“What? They don’t have any *here*?!”

“Tommy!” Tubbo hissed, desperation evident in the edges of his voice. “How are we supposed to find the jar of floo powder when we can’t even *see*?!”

Tommy whipped around to face the mantel, hands frantically searching for a pot similar to the one in his friend's living room. His heart sank when he felt nothing but picture frames and a vase of flowers.

“Fuck!” he swore, turning back around to face Tubbo, “what are we supposed to—”

He was cut off when a loud crash sounded right in his ear. He stumbled back, startled, only to yelp when he felt a sharp ceramic crunch beneath his shoes.

“You *broke* the vase? You idiot!” Tubbo whispered harshly.

“They’re by the fireplace!” Philza shouted into the darkness, striding in the direction of the commotion. “Don’t you *dare* floo out of here, you fucking cowards—”

“Tubbo!” Tommy cried, finding the catalyst in his pocket and gripping it tightly. Desperate times called for desperate measures. “Throw the bombs!”

“*Bombs*?” Philza shouted, his voice ringing in their ears. “Wait, *Tubb* —?!”

Philza Magic did not finish his sentence. At the very moment he realized the mystery attackers’ identities, Tommy and Tubbo hurled the dung bombs at the floor.

What happened next was an explosion of chaos.

The second the dung bombs landed, they filled the room with a stench so foul that both Tommy and Tubbo doubled over. Tears streamed down Tommy’s face and he could hear Tubbo gagging beside him. Philza Magic began to cough loudly and Claire started screaming for help, barely audible over the sounds of the decoy detonator’s continuous screeching.

When his coughing had subsided a bit, Tommy stood up, preparing to make his escape. The darkness was starting to wear off, and he could just *barely* make out the outline of his friend clinging to the wall. He took a deep breath through his mouth and grabbed Tubbo's upper arm, tugging his friend towards the living room door that would be their only way out of their predicament.

They sprinted around furniture, stumbling their way through the darkness as best as they could without alerting the others in the room of their locations. They had *almost* made it over the threshold when two tall shadows appeared in the doorway, making Tommy swear under his breath.

"Tubbo?" he whispered.

"Yeah?"

"We're fucked."

"But the door is right — *oh*. Yeah, we're fucked."

The two figures had run into the room, wands drawn, ready to attack. Tommy and Tubbo moved behind an armchair, desperately trying to stay out of sight. Unfortunately, they were making a decent amount of noise.

"Mom? Phil? Is that you?!" one of the figures called out frantically. Tommy's heart stuttered in his chest; he'd never heard that particular voice sound so terrified.

"Techno, where are they? Can you see anything?" the second figure asked a bit more evenly. Techno gestured in Tommy and Tubbo's direction, clearly struggling to make anything out in the dark.

"Someone broke in! They're tryin ta hurt Mom!" Techno yelled, waving his wand to cast a spell. "*Lumos! LUMOS! FUCK! Wil It's not workin'! Wil why isn't it workin'?!*"

The darkness was beginning to fade, seeping through the now open door. Tommy knew that if he and Tubbo wanted to make it out of the situation unscathed, they would have to make a break for it.

So, determined to salvage what was left of their plan, he grit his teeth and sprinted, Tubbo in hand, towards their exit.

...where he careened straight into Philza Magic.

"There you are! *SASIMMULATIO!*" Phil chanted, his wand tip pressed to the back of Tommy's neck. A cool feeling instantly washed over him as the counter charm took effect, his body once again becoming opaque. The spell was cast on Tubbo a second later and soon both boys stood frozen in pure fear as the last of the darkness faded and they were left completely exposed.

Funnily enough, the first person who Tommy saw when he looked up wasn't Philza, it was Wilbur. The curly haired boy was looking down at him with a look of rage Tommy'd never seen before.

Wil looked angrier than he had when they'd turned Friend blue, which was saying something.

Tommy didn't even *look* at Technoblade. He could feel the pink haired boy's stare drilling holes into the side of his head, the fury emanating from him in waves.

“H-hello, boys,” Tommy stuttered nervously, turning to meet Philza’s disapproving gaze. “How are you this afternoon?”

The room erupted into chaos for a second time that day.

“WHAT THE *HELL* ARE YOU DOIN’ IN MY HOUSE?!” Techno roared, marching up to Tommy and grabbing the front of his sweater in his fist, almost lifting the boy off his feet. “DO YOU EVEN *KNOW* WHAT I THOUGHT WAS GOIN’ ON?”

“Uhhh...” Tommy gulped and put his hands up pleadingly. “We can explain—”

“If we were in school,” Philza seethed, “I would be taking a hundred points from Gryffindor and Hufflepuff right now.”

Tommy and Tubbo winced. Phil was shaking his head angrily.

“I thought you were *intruders*, ” he continued, voice rising in volume. “I was about to *curse* you! I could have *seriously* hurt you!”

“They *are* intruders!” Techno cried, pointing his wand at Tommy’s head. “They’re trespassin’! In my home! I don’t want those little shits in here! I vote we hex ‘em anyway!”

“Sweetheart, let’s not—” Claire tried to calm her son, but the young man was *not* having it.

“Mom, I thought they were tryin ta *kill* you!” he exclaimed, voice breaking at the end. “D’you even know how scared I was? I heard all the n-noise and the explosions and I thought you were gonna *die*. ” Tears welled up in Techno’s eyes, prompting the boy to wipe them away furiously. “I th-thought I was gonna lose you like I lost Dad and...and...”

Wilbur wrapped an arm around the shaking Techno and led him out of the room, throwing a murderous look over his shoulder as he left. Tommy cast his eyes down at his feet, feeling like absolute shit.

“Tommy. Tubbo. Hello,” Claire said evenly, her voice strained. “I believe you two have some explaining to do. And a living room to help clean.”

Tubbo shuffled in place. “But we aren’t allowed to do underage magic. How are we supposed to help clean?”

Phil pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. “Tubbo, how do you think Claire cleans?”

“She’s a Muggle, you shithead,” Tommy muttered.

“That I am. Phil, would you deal with this? I need to go see my son.”

With that, Mrs. Technoblade left the room, leaving Philza alone with the two first-years.

“We are obviously going to talk about this later,” the older wizard said with a shake of his head. “I can’t believe you two did that. What were you even trying to do?”

“Uh... prank Techno,” Tommy mumbled, causing Phil to let out a dry laugh.

“Ha! Quite a prank, indeed. I think you’ve about bloody traumatized the kid! And Tubbo, why would you go along with this?!”

“... sorry, Phil.”

“You should be! Look at this mess of a living room!”

Tommy looked around him, taking in the wreckage. Pieces of broken ceramic were scattered on the floor from where the vase had shattered, a puddle of water pooled by their feet. The Peruvian darkness powder had colored all of the furniture in what looked like a thick layer of black dust and the room absolutely *reeked*.

“Oh,” he said dumbly. “We really fucked it up.”

“That’s an understatement.” Phil closed his eyes and took a deep breath in, his face smoothing into a neutral expression. He raised his wand and Tommy flinched, moving his arm in front of Tubbo, expecting a hex or a jinx to come his way. It was his idea to prank Techo, Tubbo shouldn’t get hurt. But to his surprise, the spell Phil cast was entirely different.

“*Expecto Patronum*,” he breathed. The two young boys watched in fascination as a pale silver mist left his wand tip and swirled into the shape of a crow with wings that glittered like stars.

“Tell Mr. and Mrs. Bumble to come fetch their son,” Phil instructed the patronus. The misty bird obediently flew off, phasing through the wall. Once it was gone, Tommy and Tubbo stared at Phil in awe.

“How did you do that?” Tommy wondered, eyes wide and inquisitive. “What was that ghost-bird-thing?”

“Was that a *real* patronus?” Tubbo asked disbelievingly. “That’s *very* advanced magic!”

Phil waved their questions away with a hand. “That is none of your concern at the moment,” he said coolly. “You should be worried about what your parents will say once I tell them about your recent escapades.”

Their reprimanding went on for a good long while, and once it was over they had to sit in the shit smelling living room, waiting for Phil’s patronus to return. The bird had to go all the way to the ministry to fetch Tubbos’ parents. The two sat guiltily on the couch as Technoblade’s mother reentered the room, handing Tubbo a broom and Tommy a dustpan. Philza watched as the two swept up the shattered remains of the vase Tommy had knocked over.

The only good thing to come out of their horrendous attempt at a prank, came about five minutes before Tubbos parents materialized in the Technoblade’s living room. After Techno had seemingly calmed down, it was his turn to be yelled at. It turned out that Tommy and Tubbo weren’t the only ones doing something they weren’t supposed to. Apparently, Wilbur and Technoblade had been listening at the door to what was apparently a very secret and important meeting. The two boys tried their best not to grow shit eating grins at the sound of the teenagers being yelled at in the hall by Mrs. Technoblade. But they couldn’t help it.

The grins fell rapidly however when Tubbo’s parents arrived on the scene, with Philza by their sides. They were shrieking about how Tommy and Tubbo had interrupted their work in the department of broom regulatory control, and how their foolishness would be forcing them to work overtime.

As Phil lit a magical fire for the family to return home with, Tommy caught a glimpse of Technoblade in the hall. The two wizards made eye contact, and the look the older boy had on his face was murderous. Tommy could only smile sheepishly at him before being whisked away by emerald flames.

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Returning home for spring break was painful.

The second Dream and Schlatt stepped over the threshold into the Selwyn family home, his father greeted him with a smile and an affectionate ruffle of his hair. Though the welcome was supposed to be warm, his father's fingers felt ice cold as they scraped against his scalp, sending shivers down his spine.

"Jebediah!" Mr. Selwyn proceeded to greet the other boy, "Pleasure to have you back here, my boy. Drista will be delighted."

"Thanks, Sir. Where is the little pipsqueak, anyway?" Schlatt questioned, Dream only rolled his eyes and headed toward the staircase.

Dream's father summoned Bippy with a snap of his fingers and gestured for the elf to magic their luggage upstairs. Only when the bags had vanished did he answer Schlatt's question. "Drista is with her mother. They're shopping for dress robes in Diagon Alley."

Dream paused on his way up the stairs, turning to shoot him a questioning look. "Dress robes? Is mom gonna throw another fundraiser?"

Mr. Selwyn's lip twitched and Schlatt winced.

"Have you forgotten already, Clay?" the wizard asked. "Even after our correspondence?"

When Dream said nothing, Schlatt muttered, "Your sister's birthday, buddy. It's tomorrow."

A wave of shame washed over Dream as he realized what day it was. His father's words from that letter came back to him, a mean whisper in the back of his mind.

*Speaking of your sister, Drista will be turning seven years old in April.*

It was April. April eleventh. Which meant the next day was the twelfth, which meant his little sister was turning seven.

And he was such a shitty excuse of a brother that he had completely forgotten about it.

"Right," Dream mumbled, trying not to make eye contact with anyone in the room.

His father's voice was dripping with disapproval as he commented, "I suppose you two have been preoccupied with your studies. I hope you've been studying for your upcoming examinations, Clay."

"Oh, we both have, Sir. The Hogwarts library is basically our second home," Schlatt jumped in with a smile and a cheeky thumbs-up. Mr. Selwyn gave Schlatt an affectionate smile, and waved the boys away.

"Upstairs, then. Unpack your things and be ready to leave for Caerphilly in an hour or so. We've just received a new shipment of dragon eggs which are incubating as we speak, and I am eager to hear your thoughts on the species, Jebediah."

Schlatt paused behind Dream, his hand on the bannister. “Are those the Ender Dragons you were telling me about before?”

“Indeed,” Selwyn replied with a smile. “You won’t want to miss their hatching, so I advise you to hurry.”

“Yes, Sir!” Schlatt said, pushing Dream out of the way and sprinting up the staircase. Dream sighed heavily and followed his roommate, his own steps slow and reluctant. When he entered their bedroom, he found Schlatt hurriedly unpacking his trunk, throwing his things across the floor.

“Are you *actually* excited to go to the lab?” Dream asked, plopping himself unceremoniously atop his bed. Schlatt paused, face twitching in response to the question.

“It’s a newly-discovered species of dragon,” he uttered somewhat robotically. “I am looking forward to seeing the eggs.”

Dream didn’t ask Schlatt any more questions after that. Conversation was difficult when one’s conversation partner was bound by a curse which forced him to give up information against his will.

Schlatt eventually went back downstairs, leaving Dream alone in his room. He idly picked up the little doll George had given him ages ago when they were second-years, giving the object’s soft white body a gentle squeeze.

“*You’re a moron!*” it chirped in Dream’s own voice.

Dream gave the doll a wry smile. Its derpy, blobby face smiled back.

“Yeah,” he finally sighed, setting the doll back on his bedside table. “I am a moron. A *big* one.”

Suddenly, there was a soft shuffling noise at the foot of his bed. Dream looked down and saw that his school robes, which he’d carelessly tossed atop his duvet, were wiggling suspiciously. The movement paused momentarily before a familiar white paw poked out from underneath the black fabric to give Dream’s toe a whack.

The blond huffed and swiftly cast the garment aside, revealing a curious-looking Patches crouched by his feet. Her hiding spot gone, she stood up and stretched before padding right up to her guardian and settling comfortably in his lap.

Dream snorted at the feline’s behavior. “I was gonna get up, you know,” he said to the cat, giving her a loving scratch under her chin. His actions earned him a rumbling purr. “But no, now I have to sit here and pet you. I guess that’s how it goes, huh?”

“Prrrrrrt?” Patches chirped, turning her head to blink up at him with her big yellow-green eyes.

“Yeah. All of my friends kinda hate me right now,” Dream answered, stroking between her ears.

“Mrrreow.”

“I tried to find a place to stay over the break, you know. I’d usually ask George, but he hates me. And that means I couldn’t ask any of the other Ravenboys, either, because it would just be awkward.”

Patches yawned. Dream treated it like a verbal response.

“And Schlatt is like, homeless, so it’s not like I could ask *him* cuz he already lives with me. And GB80 has some stupid quidditch program or like a camp thing — did you know they had those during the spring? I thought camps were a summer thing!”

“Prrrrrt.”

“Ugh, and I’d literally rather *die* than ask Eric. Dude’s an idiot.”

Patches flipped onto her back, showing off a beautiful white, orange, and brown stomach that Dream was not allowed to pet unless he wanted his hand bitten off.

“You’re kind of a tease, Patches.” he chuckled. “You *know* that makes me wanna rub your belly.”

Another yawn. Dream sighed and leaned his head back against his headboard.

“Sapnap’s in America, Bad’s volunteering all break...I really had *no options*. I guess I’ll just have to tough this one out. It’s only two weeks,” he said, more to himself than to his cat. “But hey, at least I have you, right?”

“Mreow.”

“You’re such a sweet girl. I love you.”

When Patches began to bathe herself on his lap, Dream took it as a silent *I love you, too*.

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Dream liked to think of himself as an alright person.

Was he a good person? Probably not. Good people had friends who cared about them. Good people didn’t hurt others out of selfishness. Good people were strong and brave in the face of moral conflict, so Dream thought it was safe to say that he wasn’t one.

But did the absence of all those good traits make him a *bad* person? He didn’t think so. On the spectrum of good and bad, Dream figured that he was probably somewhere in the middle. Not good, not bad, just decent.

The next day however, as he stood in the middle of his backyard wearing frilly fuschia dress robes, per Drista’s request, and holding a platter of bright pink cupcakes, he found himself contemplating some things that only *very* bad people could think up. Most of them having to do with cursing seven-year-olds.

“CUPCAKES!” shrieked one of his sister’s guests, a little girl in a shimmering purple skirt and matching purple ballet shoes. Dream had to lift the tray high above his head to prevent the child from grabbing one of the treats with her grubby little fingers.

“Not yet,” he grumbled, sidestepping the girl and making his way over to the large picnic table his mother had set up. Unfortunately, the child’s shriek had attracted the attention of the other party guests, who were eyeing the cupcake tray excitedly.

“DRISTA! YOUR BROTHER WON’T GIVE ME A CUPCAKE!” the girl in purple screamed angrily, crossing her arms in front of her chest and pouting. Drista hurriedly ran over to the table.

“Dream!” she called out with far too much authority for a seven year old, “give Shantelle a cupcake!”

Dream bit back a retort and set the cupcake tray safely in the center of the table where he could easily defend it from eager children. “No.”

“Yes!” Drista demanded, stomping her foot. “It’s my birthday so you have to do what I want! Give Shantelle a cupcake, and give me one, too!”

Do not hex the child. Do not hex the child. Do not hex the child.

“Mom said you have to wait for your lunch before you get any,” he said through gritted teeth. His answer didn’t seem to satisfy the seven-year-olds, who began to protest as if Dream had said the most horrific thing that ever walked the earth.

“Your brother is a stupid asshole!” one of the other girls told Drista emphatically. Several other children shouted in agreement.

Fueled by her friends’ demands, Drista narrowed her eyes and drew in a sharp breath. “Give us the cupcakes or I’ll tell Mom!”

“Tell Mom?! I’m doing what Mom said, you idiot!” he snapped, causing the group of children to gasp.

“He said a bad word!”

“Drista’s brother is such a meanie!”

“Where’s your other brother? I bet Schlattie will give us cupcakes!”

Before Dream could respond that Drista didn’t *have* any other brothers or that “Schlattie” was the worst nickname he’d ever heard of, the sound of a trumpet made all the kids surrounding dream turn their heads towards the front of the house. Standing there, the source of the noise was dressed in bright rainbow-colored robes with a large red rubber nose attached to his face.

“Hey, kids!” Schlatt called out, blowing once more into the instrument in his hands. “Who’s ready for some clown time?!”

The cupcakes were immediately forgotten as the crowd abandoned Dream in favor of Schlatt, who began blaring his trumpet again. The song was horrendous but the children clapped, anyway.

Simple-minded mini-morons.

Dream huffed and stomped back inside the house, taking off the hideous fuschia robes as soon as he was out of sight of the children. His father raised an eyebrow at the cast-aside garment but chose not to comment on his son’s behavior; their house elf would pick up his discarded clothes soon enough anyways. Instead, he waved Dream over to the coffee table and gestured to a large triple-tier cake in the center of it.

“What are your thoughts on the cake, Dream?” Mr. Selwyn asked casually.

Dream paused and took in the monstrous dessert. The cake was *massive*, far too large for any of the party guests to consume. The House-elves had frosted the cake pink to match Drista’s chosen birthday theme, and as a result it looked far more like an elaborate decoration than anything intended for human consumption.

“It’s...nice,” he said carefully, eyeing the seven birthday candles arranged neatly in a circle atop the third tier. His father’s expression was unreadable as he nodded at Dream’s words.

“Drista was very explicit with her instructions.”

“Yep.”

Dream shuffled awkwardly in place, feeling like the conversation wasn’t over. When his dad inhaled deeply, his suspicions were confirmed.

“Will you be the one to take the photograph, Clay? It will be nice to have both our children pictured on the mantel,” Mr. Selwyn commented, nodding to the opposite wall where a framed photo of a young Dream was hung directly above the fireplace. Dream turned his head to look at the framed picture, even though he could describe every one of its details with his eyes closed.

The photograph was taken on his seventh birthday, which he had celebrated in Florida. The frame held a blond, chubby-cheeked boy with freckles smattering across his features, and two front teeth missing. Dream watched as the mini version of him in the photo grinned excitedly at a large green sheet cake spread out before him. In the center of the cake — which was decorated with little iced dragons — was a toy wand. A toy wand was traditionally given to magical children on their seventh birthday as a symbol of their proper entrance into the magical world.

Dream couldn’t help but smile at the innocent little boy in the picture. He was smiling like the cake was the best thing he’d ever seen, his shoulders bouncing up and down with gleeful laughter. Dream still had the toy wand upstairs somewhere in his bedroom — it couldn’t be used to perform any real magic, of course, but it gave off sparks every time someone waved it. It was a happy memory.

That was when Dream realized what was different about Drista’s cake.

He abruptly turned back around and met his father’s knowing gaze. “Where’s the wand?” he demanded, tearing his eyes away from his father to scan his eyes over the pink cake again. Sure enough, the toy that usually stuck proudly in the center of a seven-year-old wizard or witch’s birthday cake was glaringly absent.

Dream’s father sighed. “Why would you think your sister would receive one, Clay?”

“Because it’s tradition. *Everyone* gets a toy wand for their seventh birthday.”

Mr. Selwyn tutted. “Not everyone. Every *magical* child gets a toy wand.”

The weight of his father’s words settled uncomfortably in between them.

“But...” Dream began, fists clenching and unclenching at his sides, “Drista *is* a magical child. She comes from a magical family. It’s her tradition, too.”

“I did not take you for the sentimental type. Since when were you one to value tradition?”

The remark was a poorly-veiled insult that made Dream want to scream in frustration. Instead, he took a breath to calm himself before continuing.

“She’s a *kid*, Dad. Did you...did you and Mom even tell her she’s different, yet?”

His father’s silence was all the answer Dream needed.

“Hold on,” Dream said, raising himself to his full height as he pointed a finger at his father, “you were just planning on, what? Telling her *in front of her friends*? Not even having a *conversation* with her? Do you —do you even *know* how horrible she’s gonna feel? Wh-what the *fuck* Dad?!”

Mr. Selwyn raised an eyebrow. “Clay, there’s nothing horrible about lacking magic,” he drawled, his gaze steely. “Is there?”

“Wh...*no*, of course there isn’t, but—”

“Then I fail to understand your problem with this. There is no grand announcement happening, Clay. Your mother and I simply find it foolish to indulge your younger sister in a magical rite of passage when she, herself, is not magic.”

“It’s a *toy*!”

“It’s a symbol.”

Dream abruptly turned away from his dad and marched towards the staircase.

“Clay,” Mr. Selwyn called out, “where do you think you’re going?”

“My room,” Dream snapped without bothering to turn around.

“But it’s almost time for cake.”

Dream didn’t respond to the comment, opting to slam his bedroom door as loudly as he could. Uncaring of his father’s undoubtedly furious state, he threw open his bottom desk drawer and pulled out the long-forgotten wooden keepsake to which he hadn’t given any serious thought in years.

The miniature wand was thin and had intricate patterns carved into the light holly wood. Dream hadn’t known it at the time, but the wand he received for his seventh birthday wasn’t all that different in appearance to the one he’d purchased at age eleven.

It felt like real life foreshadowing.

He pocketed the wand and snuck back downstairs to where the party guests were just finishing up lunch. He saw Schlatt at the far end of the table, a french fry in one hand and a stick of face paint in the other as he colored a little girl’s cheeks pink. Dream smiled faintly at the sight and took a seat on the back porch steps.

Once the House-elf had finished collecting everyone’s plates, his mother clapped her hands and announced that it was time for cake. The children cheered and eagerly returned to their seats in anticipation.

Dream wasn’t surprised by the sight of the extravagant dessert, but his sister’s friends sure were. They *oooh* ed and *aah* ed when the cake was levitated through the air and placed directly in front of Drista, who smiled like she’d been handed the moon.

They would have started singing and clapping and it would have been perfect if one of Drista’s party guests didn’t have such a big mouth.

“Drista, where’s your wand?” the girl in purple asked loudly. Dream tensed and glanced over to his father, who was watching the birthday scene unfold with an unreadable expression on his face.

Asshole.

Drista immediately noticed the absence of the toy and frowned. “Yeah,” she said, turning to Bippy. “You elves made the cake wrong!”

“Miss Selwyn, Bippy made the pink cake just as Miss Selwyn said,” the elf squeaked.

“No! The sparkler wand is missing! I’m seven now, and when you’re seven, you get a wand!”

“B-but Master Selwyn instructed B-Bippy n-not to—”

It was then that Dream made an executive decision.

“Oh, silly Bippy!” he exclaimed loudly, placing a hand on the elf’s little shoulder. The creature flinched under his touch, but he didn’t remove the hand as he pulled a familiar item from his robe pocket. “Here it is!”

He very deliberately thrust the toy wand into the House-elf’s hands and prayed that Bippy wouldn’t ask any questions.

“Master Selwyn?” Bippy asked, eyes widening. “B-Bippy did not know that Bippy was supposed to place this wand on the cake! Bippy is sorry, Master Selwyn’s father told Bippy that squib—”

“*Put it on the cake. Now,*” Dream hissed, cutting the elf off. The seven-year-olds clapped when Bippy placed the toy in the middle of the cake. When Dream finally looked up and met his father’s eyes, he saw cold fury reflected back in them.

Good.

Thankfully, his parents let their daughter eat her cake and entertain her guests without further incident. Dream was grateful that they at least had the decency not to make a spectacle in front of the other kids.

Though without putting the wand on the cake, they were already setting themselves up for one.

The rest of the party passed in a blur of song, party games, and way too much sugar, Dream not comprehending any of it, too full of a mix of anger and fear. When it finally came time to bid farewell to the guests, Dream ducked back into the house, breathing a sigh of relief when he managed to slip into the living room unnoticed.

Or so he thought.

“*Clay.*”

A cold hand settled on his shoulder with an unrelenting grip that could crush bones. It dragged him further into the room and spun him around until he was staring right up into the cold eyes of his father. Dream swallowed his nerves and put on the bravest face he could muster, jutting his chin out defiantly upon meeting his dad’s gaze.

“Yeah?” he said coolly.

“Do you have no respect?”

“Hmm,” Dream paused, pretending to think. “Respect for what?”

The ice in his father’s eyes flashed in a clear warning which Dream chose not to heed. “Careful,

boy. I implore you to remember with whom you are speaking.”

Dream didn’t really think about what he did next. The eye roll was purely reflexive; by the time he realized the implications of what he’d done, it was too late.

A loud *smack* echoed around the room. At first Dream didn’t realize he’d been struck, only registered the force of the blow and the fact that he’d staggered backwards. It was only after the pain washed over him — a sharp, stinging heat radiating from his cheek — that he registered what had happened.

When Dream’s hand fell away from his face, it was painted red.

Dream processed all of this as if in a trance, a part of himself refusing to process that his father had *actually* hit him. But the evidence was staring him right in the face. His dad’s lips were pulled into a thin line, the only sign of his fury the heaving of his shoulders with each angry breath. Dream let his eyes trail down to his father’s hands, his gaze landing upon an intricately cut serpentine emerald nestled below the knuckle of his middle finger. The ring was carved to resemble a snake.

Its tiny emerald fangs glinted red with Dream’s blood.

And suddenly, Dream had nothing more to say to his father.

He spun on his heel and took the stairs up to his room two at a time. If his father shouted anything after him, he didn’t hear it.

It didn’t matter.

The door to his room swung open with a *bang*. Inside, Schlatt was changing out of his stupid clown get up. The other boy jumped in surprise at Dream’s dramatic entrance.

“Dream-boat? You good, buddy?” Schlatt asked, his expression alarmed. When Dream didn’t answer, Schlatt narrowed his eyes before gasping at the sight of his roommate’s face. “You’re *bleeding*, pal!”

Dream angrily swiped at the cut on his cheek, wincing when his fingers brushed over the angry red wound.

“Oh, wow, really?” he replied snarkily, throwing open his closet door and grabbing fistfulls of random clothing, the blood on his hands smearing off onto the clean clothes. He tossed the garments on his bed haphazardly.

“Uh-huh. The hell happened?”

Dream remained silent. He found his school trunk and wasted no time in shoving his gathered clothing inside.

Schlatt sighed. “Well if you’re not gonna tell me, I get it, but you should at least have someone heal that for ya. You’re gonna end up with a nasty scar if ya don’t.”

“Don’t care,” Dream answered.

“Don’t be stupid. Why don’t you just summon the elf and it’ll—”

“Let. It. Scar. ” Dream hissed. Schlatt fell silent.

After a few moments, he cleared his throat. “Where are you going?”

“Away.”

“Where?”

“Anywhere but here.”

He slammed the trunk closed and took a deep breath. “Anywhere away from my fucking father,” he clarified quietly, a hardness in his voice.

Thankfully, Schlatt didn’t say anything judgemental. He merely shrugged and scratched his head. “There’s a cheap inn on Knockturn Alley above the tattoo place. It ain’t pretty and it’s a bit...sketchy, but Anne-Marie will give you a discount if you tell her you know me.”

Dream nodded. “Thanks.”

“Sure. Take care of yourself, okay?”

“I will.”

Dream heaved the trunk onto the floor and stretched, groaning in satisfaction when his back let out several *pop* s. He shot Schlatt with what he hoped came off as a grateful smile.

“I’ll see you on the platform.”

Schlatt snorted. “You better.”

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His week at the inn was...alright.

The witch at the front desk had seemed surprised to see him check in, but she accepted his money with a tight-lipped smile and gave him a room overlooking some Dark Arts store called Cobb and Webb’s. Dream tried to tune out the eerie sounds of the wind howling outside his window at night as he slept, focusing instead on the strange emptiness which had settled in his heart.

No one came looking for him.

In the back of his mind, he supposed he expected someone to at least *try* to contact him. He listened out for the tell-tale pecking of an owl at the window or the brisk knock of his father at his door, but no one ever came.

He’d run away from home and nobody seemed to care..

He wondered idly if his family even noticed his absence. Knowing his father, he was probably ecstatic to finally have Dream out of his hair, and his mother was probably indifferent. Drista might’ve asked about him, but even she had Schlatt to keep her company.

What Dream learned over the course of his stay in the shadows of Knockturn Alley was that he was disposable.

When it finally came time to check out of the inn and make his way to the Hogwarts Express, Dream had mentally prepared himself for the loneliness. And yet, not even the darkest part of his

imagination could've truly prepared Dream for the searing agony that struck his heart upon seeing his old friend group, laughing together and wanting nothing to do with him.

Dream missed the Raven Cart.

He missed the banter of the compartment. He missed his back-and-forths with Sapnap. He missed Wilbur's random bouts of song and Techno's groans of protest.

Most of all, he missed George.

He missed George more than anything.

His classes, when he returned to them, were awful. Meals in the dining hall were unbearable. The castle's bustling corridors felt so empty without his George alongside him.

He tried to pretend that he was fine, that he was ok. He pretended that it didn't hurt to see George talking and laughing with his roommates as if Dream had never existed. He tried to convince himself that he started spending more time on the grounds because he needed the fresh air, that he *liked* being alone. He told himself that not seeing George at all was better for him than having to watch George from afar.

On the rare occasions that Dream *did* run into George, the other boy refused to acknowledge him. It tore Dream's heart in two.

So he stayed away and tried to pretend that everything was okay.

He tried.

And failed.

Because Dream wasn't okay.

With every passing week that they didn't speak, he felt his best friend's absence more and more.

The more meals he ate alone at the Slytherin table, the more terrible the food seemed to taste, and the less hungry he soon became. The Great Hall became one of his least favorite places in the castle.

He hated having to watch George laugh at other people's jokes during meal times. He hated that *they* were the ones making him smile.

Eventually, Dream stopped attending meals altogether. He ate in his dorm room or in his common room. When he was hungry, he'd visit the kitchens in the basement, where the castle's House-elves would offer him platters of whatever he asked for.

He told himself that it was better, eating alone.

He supposed, in a way, that he should have seen it coming. Even before their falling out, he'd never liked the idea of others being closer to George than he was. He'd always brushed the feeling off, but George's absence made it painfully obvious what that emotion was that of: dark, possessive jealousy.

Dream was jealous of George's other friends. The jealous monster inside him roared in pain and anger whenever Dream glimpsed Wilbur with his arm wrapped around George's shoulder or Techno said something that made George laugh. Now that George was forbidden to Dream, the

jealousy had no outlet. It was all-consuming and it made Dream face the truth.

Life just wasn't as good without George. Life without George grew worse and worse every day.

A month passed in solitude. Dream was miserable.

Perhaps solitude was an exaggeration. The truth was, Dream wasn't always alone. He had the girls.

As if sensing his heartbreak, they absorbed him into their group, no questions asked. It began with subtle invitations masked as favors — requests for Dream to help Minx with her Transfiguration homework even though Dream was just as shit at Transfiguration as she was, Niki asking Dream to help her carry heavy objects to the Hufflepuff common room — but soon evolved into Dream spending a large portion of his time every day in their presence.

Dream was grateful for the company.

Spending time with the girls made him realize just how reliant he'd been on George for social interaction. Before the fallout, he hadn't really bothered to get to know Minx at all, and Niki and Puffy had merely been names he'd heard in passing. But the more he sat with them at meal times, the more he envied their natural friendship dynamic. Where Minx was chaotic and brash, Niki was soothing and thoughtful; where Puffy was loud, brazen, and loyal, Minx and Niki were more subdued. The three of them balanced each other perfectly — a golden trio of sorts.

They were all kind, caring people. Dream couldn't believe he hadn't paid them more attention before.

He found himself gravitating towards Minx a lot, mostly because he knew her best. They were in the same year and House, after all, and they shared most of their classes. While Minx's harsh words and hot-and-cold personality had been a shock to Dream's system at first, he soon adapted to her peculiar ways of showing affection.

Something Dream had a harder time getting used to, however, was her unreasonable level of enthusiasm for quidditch.

The second to last quidditch match of the season took place on a sunny Sunday in mid-May. Dream fully intended on spending the match curled up on his bed in his dorm room — the game was Ravenclaw vs Slytherin, and he didn't think his heart would survive the sight of George on the other side of the pitch, cheering and laughing with his friends.

When he told Minx of his plans, though, she flipped the fuck out.

"Yer *abso-fuckin-lutely* coming, ye little slug!" she'd yelled out during dinner, earning them glares from nearby professors and prefects. "I let you miss the last one, but yer *not* skivin' off again! Not when it's *our feckin' team* playin'!"

Dream winced at her tone. From beside Minx, Puffy cleared her throat.

"You should really come, Dream. The winner of this match will play Gryffindor in the final," she said. Niki nodded in agreement.

"You'll have us!" the Hufflepuff chimed in. "We'll all sit in the back together — it will be fun!"

And that was how Dream found himself trailing behind Minx on Sunday morning as their little group of four filed into the stands.

“Oh, stand up straighter, ye dumb fuck. Ya look pathetic,” she hissed, throwing a punch at Dream’s shoulder to get him to stop slouching. “Yer boyfriend is on the other side of the fuckin’ stands, he can’t even see shite!”

Dream glowered at his Housemate but grudgingly straightened up. “Will you fuck off? You don’t have to be so loud,” he grumbled.

“What she *means* is you shouldn’t worry so much,” Niki said soothingly, ignoring Minx’s scoff. “The Ravenclaws are all the way on the other side of the pitch. You won’t have to talk to any of them if you don’t want to.”

Dream shrugged, choosing not to snap at the Hufflepuff girl. He knew, logically, that Niki was right, but his anxiety was skyrocketing with every fragment of blue he glimpsed out of the corner of his eye.

They eventually settled into one of the rows in the back of the stands. Minx complained about the view, but even she could sense that front row seats were not a good idea given Dream’s mental state. When she grew tired of complaining, she busied herself with touching up Dream’s hastily applied green face paint.

“Argh! Stop!” Dream whined, batting her hands away. Niki giggled at their antics.

“Aww, let Minx have her fun. You know how much she loves House Pride!”

Dream gave the Hufflepuff girl a look but relented. Minx grinned triumphantly as she applied yet another layer of emerald paint to his forehead.

“How come only *I* have to wear a full face? You didn’t cover Niki or Puffy in this crap,” he pointed out.

“Shut up or yer goin ta make me smudge it. That’s because they did it themselves, see Niki with her little green hearts? Plus they aren’t even Slytherin *and* they let me do their hair.”

“Oh, Minx! You have to do his hair too!” Niki cheered, twirling her own dark green braids around her finger. Minx had even tied the look together with bright emerald ribbons.

Dream abruptly moved his arms so they covered as much of his shaggy hair as he could manage. “No!” he yelped. “No fucking way! The hair does *not* change!”

“Awwww, not even a streak?” Puffy asked, puppy eyes accented with sparkling green eyeshadow.

“No! Do *not* touch my— *Minx, stop!*”

Before Dream could move out of her reach, Minx was grabbing a fistful of his hair and tapping it with her wand. A muttered spell later, she released her hold on the strands, eliciting a groan from Dream once he saw that the tips of his hair were newly green. He glared at Minx, she only glared back.

“You’re lucky we’re in public,” he grumbled, “or I would curse you into oblivion.”

“Shh! The match is starting!”

Sure enough, he could see the uniformed outlines of the Slytherin quidditch team marching onto the field. He easily recognized GB80’s distinctive black and white hair on one end of the pitch and Techno’s pink ponytail on the other. He was about to make a comment to Minx when a bright flash

illuminated the side of his face.

He quickly turned his head and was met with the sight of Minx giggling delightedly, one of *his* belongings in her hands.

“*Where* did you get that?!” he shouted, lunging forward and making a grab for the camera. To his frustration, she dodged him easily and took another picture.

“Yer trunk!” she supplied happily. “It was just sittin there askin teh be used! How could I not?” she said. She turned to take a picture of Niki and Puffy, who both smiled broadly for the camera.

“How do you even know how to use a Muggle camera?” he exclaimed as she tossed the device to Niki before Dream could snatch it out of her hands. The Hufflepuff caught it with a giggle.

“I’m not fuckin stupid, Selwyn. You act like I didn’t pay any fuckin attention in Muggle Studies,” Minx retorted. Dream flinched when Puffy leaned into him from her spot on the bench, hugging him from behind. Minx eagerly leaned into frame and tugged on his ear as the camera flashed again. “And it’s not like it’s *that* different from a wizard camera. It’s jus’ one button, for Merlin’s sake! How thick d’ye think I am?”

Just then, a whistle sounded from below. Dream felt a rush of air on his face as the players took to the sky in unison. Mere seconds into the start of the game, GB80 whizzed by the stands, a smirk on his face as he aimed a heavy bludger directly at Technoblade.

“Yes! Techno’s gonna drop the quaffle!” Minx squealed delightedly.

The audience watched in awe as Technoblade executed a flawless Sloth Grip Roll with the quaffle clutched tightly under one arm. The Ravenclaw supporters all cheered when he managed to score a goal for Ravenclaw within the first minute of the game.

With the Slytherin players on the offense, Techno retreated into a defensive position on his broom. Over the noise of the girls still goofing off with his camera, Dream heard a loud ‘whoop’ from somewhere on the other side of the stands. Upon turning his head to find the source of the sound, Dream’s eyes caught on the unmistakable figure of Wilbur standing on his seat and waving a pink flag emblazoned with an image of what looked like an eagle wearing a crown. Technoblade spared a moment to smile and wave at the curly haired boy before zooming off to pursue the quaffle once more.

Dream, however, did not look away. Because sitting next to Wilbur, cheering happily, was George.

The fleeting wave of happiness Dream had been riding dissipated as quickly as it had come.

George was sitting between Wilbur and Eret. All three of them were wearing bright blue robes and matching crowns, in support of Technoblade.

What really hurt Dream wasn’t just seeing George. It was seeing just how *happy* George looked, cheering and laughing and standing up on his bench with Wilbur whenever Ravenclaw was in possession of the quaffle.

Simply put, George looked fine. Better, even, than he had when Dream was his best friend.

His skin was clear, his cheeks full, the bags that hung below his eyes looked like blemishes compared to the dark purple caverns that sat below Dream’s own emerald eyes. George looked so happy to be without Dream, he looked better without him.

All of the emotions Dream had been trying to suppress suddenly hit him with the force of a thousand raging hippogriffs.

He could feel himself spiraling, sinking hopelessly into that familiar pit of despair. Before he could drown in it, though, his attention was ripped away from the opposite stands when someone jabbed him hard in the shoulder.

“Hey— uh Dream? Dream! DREAM!”

“What—huh?” he said, whipping around and coming face-to-face with a concerned-looking Puffy.

“Are you alright?” she said, eyebrows creasing. “You, like, totally blanked on us for a moment there.”

“No, yeah,” he shrugged dismissively. “I-I’m fine.”

He tried to smile at her, but it felt more like a pained grimace. It probably looked like one too, considering her frown only grew deeper. However, she didn’t push him further, opting to turn back to the game instead.

Minx had followed Dream's gaze, and cast him a knowing look before abruptly changing the subject. “Puffy? D’ye ‘ave any food?”

“Uh...I’ve probably got something in my bag,” the Gryffindor replied. “Why?”

“I’m hungry,” Minx shrugged. She paused before yanking on a lock of Dream's hair. “This idiot is too, he hasn’t eaten today”

“Fuck off,” Dream threw out halfheartedly, and rubbed his tingling scalp as Minx snorted in response.

Puffy pulled her school bag into her lap and started rummaging around in it, pulling out a green baseball cap and placing it on her head before continuing to search. Niki giggled from her spot next to Dream. Puffy paused, looking up at Niki.

“What?”

“You look like a mum,” she said, covering her mouth with a green sweater-paw to try to stifle her laughter.

“I do not!” Puffy exclaimed, face reddening under the green glitter.

“No— you do! You look just like my mum did when she came to my quidditch games!” Niki laughed.

*That* caught Dream’s attention. “You play quidditch?” he asked, shocked by this new bit of information.

“Why the fuck aren’t ye on the team, then?” demanded Minx, the surprise in her voice matching Dream’s.

“No, no, I can’t play quidditch,” Niki waved her hands frantically while they all stared at her in amazement. “I’m actually horrible at it. But when I was like six, my parents put me on this kids’ quidditch team. The brooms only went a meter off the ground, but still. Anyways, my mum would always show up with a cap and her face painted like Puffy’s. *And* she always brought a snack bag.”



Minx howled with laughter, turning the digital camera back on and pointing it at a disgruntled Puffy. The Gryffindor glared at the camera before returning to her bag and chucking a wrapped cauldron cake at Dream's head.

"Thanks, Mom," he said teasingly, unwrapping it quickly when his stomach growled. She smacked him on the back of his head as he shoved the whole thing in his mouth, almost choking on it as he laughed with Minx and Niki.

"Call me 'Mom' again and your hair will be green forever," she threatened, raising her wand. Dream rolled his eyes at her and continued to chew on his snack.

"But Puffy," Minx started, a mischievous note in her voice, "my hair's already green. Does that mean I get to call you Mummy?"

Dream spat out a bit of his cauldron cake at that. Minx wiggled her eyebrows suggestively, her shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter.

Soon enough, all four of them were bursting into fits of giggles. It almost made Dream forget about the brunet Ravenclaw on the other side of the stands.

Almost.

No one in their group was paying attention to the match anymore, but Dream didn't mind. They were in their own little bubble of whatever the fuck, and he loved it.

Unfortunately, all bubbles were bound to burst.

"Would you shut the fuck up, Selwyn?"

At the sound of his surname, Dream stopped laughing. He turned around in his seat, looking past Puffy to see a burly sixth-year glaring down at him.

"What?" Dream snapped.

"You're causing a disturbance," the boy sneered, his friends all nodding in agreement. "Some of us are trying to support our house, ye see, because *we're* not filthy fucking blood traitors."

The girls all stopped laughing, then. Each of them turned to glare daggers at the offending boy, staring him down fearlessly even though he looked twice their size.

The boy ignored the girls' glares and continued. "*We*," he emphasized, gesturing towards himself and his cronies, "Actually want to support Slytherin instead of those tossed-up, goody-two-shoed Ravenclaw twats."

Dream's jaw clenched at the words. He had no idea who the kid was or why he had a problem with Dream, but he wasn't about to dignify him with a reply.

When Dream said nothing more, one of the kid's friends piped up. "Why are you even sitting over here, anyway?" he jeered.

"Yeah," the first kid added, smirking. "Aren't you supposed to be sitting with your mudblood boyfriend? Rubbing dicks and cheering on the squib-loving Ravenclaw chaser?"

At that, Dream lost his cool.

"Don't you fucking talk about them like that," he snarled, standing up to his full height.

“Yeah? Or what?”

“Or ye’ll be fuckin’ sorry Delaney, *you stinking fuck.*”

Dream turned in surprise as Minx climbed over the stands, shoving quiet bystanders out of her way as she made her way to the boys. She pulled her wand out of her robe menacingly and pointed it directly at the instigator’s nose, but all he did in response was laugh.

“Ooh, look, another blood traitor’s come to the rescue. How’ve you been, Minx? Got any other mudblood boyfriends we should know about?”

The bully’s friends all jeered and wolf-whistled. Minx’s grip tightened on her wand.

“Shut the *fuck up*,” she seethed, pushing her wand into his nose.

“Ooooooh, is Minx a good little girl now? Sticking up for the poor little muggle-lovers?” a third boy mocked. “Last I checked, you lost all your filthy little friends because you said the ‘*M word.*’ ”

“Suck my cock, Dunkel!” Minx spat, moving to stick her wand directly against his chest.

“Oh, calm your tits, sweetheart. I’m not stupid enough to fight a *girl.* ”

The last word had barely left the boy’s mouth before Minx had abandoned her wand and was lunging straight for his face with an outstretched fist. Puffy and Dream moved at lightning speed to restrain the Slytherin girl before she could land a single punch. Dream dragged her backwards down the stairs, and before she could turn on him Puffy had wrapped her arms around Minx’s waist, arms pinned to her side. Minx was left thrashing and snarling and in the Gryffindor girl’s arms.

“Let me hit him! Let me punch his fuckin’ face in!” she screamed. Dream picked up her wand off the floor while the bullies laughed.

“Let’s just leave,” he muttered in Puffy’s ear. “I don’t think it’s worth it, we’ll just get in trouble.”

“We’re *not fuckin’ leaving!* ” Minx yelled. “These fuckers are the ones who’ll be going — just *let me go*, Puffy!”

“No, Minx,” the first bully, Delaney smirked, “you should probably listen to Selwyn and run along. After all, you’re ruinin’ *our* quidditch experience, love.”

Minx growled at the pet name, thrashing so hard she almost escaped Puffy’s grip. Dream tugged on the Gryffindor’s sleeve, a look of pleading on his face, urging the girl to leave the stands with him. Still restraining Minx, she nodded.

Dream didn’t see the flash of light, but he heard the spell.

“*Furnunculus!*”

By the time Dream whipped his head around, the largest of the sixth-year boys was letting out a strangled cry and clutching at his rapidly reddening face. In a matter of seconds, every bit of visible skin on his body erupted in large, pulsating, blistering boils. His friends watched in horror as he keeled over in pain. Two final spells were shot at the group, resulting in two more howls of pain and frantic whispers from their useless friends.

“Quick, let’s go!” Niki shouted, giving Dream and Puffy a hard shove in the direction of the box’s

exit. Minx didn't protest as their group fled the Slytherin section of the stands, leaving the moans of the pained sixth-years far behind them.

"What the hell, Niki?!" Dream spluttered once they were far enough away from the bullies. The Hufflepuff girl was panting from their abrupt departure, but the corners of her mouth were tipped upwards in a victorious smirk.

"Well," she said, clearing her throat. "Shall we find new seats? Perhaps in the front row?"

Minx, Puffy, and Dream all gaped at her in shock.

"Niki," Minx began, "did you just cast the Pimple Jinx on that fucker?"

Niki shrugged nonchalantly.

"Oh my god, ye did!" Minx cheered, tackling the younger girl in a bear hug. "I am *so feckin' proud of ye!*"

"No way!" Puffy grinned. "That was...pretty cool. Right, Dream?"

Dream allowed himself to smile. "Yeah. It kinda was."

"This doesn't mean I support violence!" Niki rushed to add, breaking free from Minx's grip. "I still think fighting is wrong!"

Minx laughed. "But ye've gotta admit, Niki, they really deserved to be fucked up like that."

"I— yeah, I guess they did."

The group found a place in a new box, opting to choose seats closer to the front of the pitch near a group of chatty little first-year girls who shuffled away from Minx uneasily when the older girl sat down. She glared at them.

The view from their new positions was better than their old view, though Dream's breath hitched when he saw that his new seat was a lot closer to George's.

"Oh, stop," Puffy muttered in his ear, as he tried to lean back in his seat so he was less visible. "I hope you realize that those Ravenclaw boys are still *super* far away. They're not gonna see you."

"And if they *did* see you, it wouldn't matter!" Niki assured him. "All they'll see is you having fun with us!"

The rest of the game was riveting. It passed in more flashes from the camera, jokes from Niki and Minx, and more cauldron cakes from Puffy. The match was so exciting that Dream was soon forgetting all about George *and* the incident with the bullies. His eyes were glued on the players, GB80 and Techno in particular, watching as each of them perform some of the most dangerous and impressive plays he'd ever seen. Everytime he glanced back at the scoreboard, both teams' point scores were rising at rapid speeds.

About forty minutes after their seating change, Slytherin was in the lead. The score was 80-70, and the frustration on the pitch was mounting.

"Catch the fuckin' snitch already, idiots!" Minx screamed at the players zooming by. "Put on yer glasses and fuckin' *look for it!*"

"They're trying their best, Minx," Niki said levelly.

“Well their best isn’t fuckin’ good enough, now, innit?”

“Would you shut up and let us watch the game?” Dream snapped without tearing his eyes away from the quaffle. Technoblade held the ball tightly under his left arm as he flew past two of the Slytherin chasers easily. Just before he could toss the ball into one of the goal hoops, however, a bludger hit him squarely in the chest and sent his broom momentarily spiraling out of control.

“FUCK YEAH” Puffy cheered. “We’re really gonna have to watch out for him if we go up against Slytherin in the final.”

“*When* you go up against Slytherin. We’re fuckin’ winning this match.”

“...Fine, Minx, *when* we go up against Slytherin. Happy?”

“I’d be happier if we could catch that piss-colored flying marble already— *YES!* ”

The crowd roared as Slytherin’s seeker started pelting across the pitch, her body flattened on her broom.

Dream was on the edge of his seat, captivated by the action unfolding before his very eyes. She continued to zoom across the pitch into the Ravenclaw section, right arm outstretched and fingers ready to grasp around an object too small for anyone but her to see.

The Ravenclaw seeker was on his tail, but it was much too late. The Slytherin seeker’s hand was inches away from the tiny golden ball that would win her team the game instantly.

But there was a problem. Because just as the seeker’s fingers were about to close around the snitch, the snitch took a sharp turn, leaving the poor girl entirely disoriented. The snitch flitted off towards the Ravenclaw goal hoops, but it vanished before either seeker could change their course.

Down below, the referee blew her whistle.

“What the hell just happened?” Dream demanded, turning to Puffy for an explanation. The Gryffindor’s brows were furrowed in confusion.

They all leaned forward to stare down at the grassy floor of the pitch, where both teams were landing.

Niki gasped. The other three friends turned to give her questioning looks.

“What?” Dream urged.

“He caught the snitch!”

“Who?”

“Techno!”

Puffy shook her head. “What? He’s a chaser, not a seeker.”

“I know!” Niki insisted. “He must’ve done it by accident — look!”

Sure enough, right at that moment Madame Hooch stormed across the field and ripped something from Technoblades hand. A fluttering golden sphere was held between her fingers.

It took a few moments for the crowd to realize what had happened, but by then the announcer was

already explaining the match's abrupt end.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" a voice resonated magically through the stands. "It appears that Ravenclaw chaser Technoblade accidentally caught the snitch as it flew by him! This means Ravenclaw is officially *disqualified*! Slytherin wins!"

Minx screamed in delight, getting up and dancing on the bench. Dream hesitantly clapped his hands, still confused by the turn of events, he hadn't seen the boy reach out his arm for the snitch, it must've happened so fast the Techno did it out of instinct. Niki and Puffy were smiling, and stood up, gesturing for the group to leave.

"We better get outta here before the stampede of people tries to leave the stands all at once — come on," Puffy instructed.

"Oh, fine, Mummy," Minx teased, hopping up out of her seat and skipping out of sight.

The four friends regrouped at the entrance to the castle, walking into the Great Hall for dinner together. The Hall was abuzz with debate and discussion as students recalled the events of the recent game. Dream nodded along while Minx rambled on about every little maneuver.

After dinner, Dream and Minx descended to the dungeons together. They entered the common room in comfortable silence, stopping to bid each other goodnight before ducking into the staircases that led to their respective dormitories.

Dream lay in his bed for a while, still fully clothed with his curtains drawn around him. He was listening to his roommates move around their shared dorm room. He could hear Schlatt congratulating GB80 on his win over the sounds of Eric's atrocious singing coming from the shower room.

At some point, he heard the soft grinding of metal on metal, signalling that someone was pulling back the curtains around his bed. He kept his eyes closed, willing whoever it was to go away. Unfortunately, a soft grunt and a squeak of bedsprings told him that the mystery person was just getting comfortable.

"Hey, Dreamboat." Schlatt's voice was soft. Dream sighed heavily and cracked open his eyes.

"What?" he said, voice laced with mild annoyance.

Schlatt didn't seem to care that he was intruding. "How ya doing?" he inquired. Dream dropped his head back onto his pillow and groaned.

"M'fine," he grumbled.

"You sure? I heard what happened in the stands."

Dream's breath hitched. "What?"

"With Delaney and his gang," Schlatt clarified.

"Oh. Where'd you hear that? You weren't at the game."

"I heard it from Minx."

"Minx went to bed,"

"She's not allowed to leave her room once she goes in it? I wanted to know what happened at the

match *because* I'd missed it.

Dream clenched his teeth before sighing. "Could you just leave me alone for the night so I can sleep?" he snapped.

A moment's pause, and Schlatt slid off the bed.

"I'm worried about you, bud."

"I'm fine."

"You know, if you ever need to talk about your dad—"

Dream sat up and harshly pulled the bed curtains closed before Schlatt could even finish his sentence.

He rolled onto his side, scrunching his face up in anguish.

The mere mention of his dad made him feel sick to his stomach. The thought of going back home was about as appealing as the thought of hacking each of his toes off with a rusty cleaver.

School was coming to a close, and Dream didn't know what to do.

He thought about his options. The inn was unpleasant, but doable, he supposed. George obviously hated him, as would the rest of the Ravenclaw group by extension. GB80 would be busy with quidditch stuff over the summer, Niki was off to visit family in Germany, and Puffy was going to be in America. Eric was out of the question.

That left one more option. Minx.

The last time he'd been at her house had been an utter disaster. But circumstances had changed. Over the course of a few months, they had become friends.

Good friends, even.

A plan formed in his mind that night as he drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter End Notes

Hello to all new and returning readers and thanks for making it this far! Your comments keep this work going, so make sure to leave your thoughts! We read each and every single one :D

Also, I occasionally stream on Twitch! If you don't wanna miss when that happens, drop me a follow! Clickity click [here](#) to hang out and be nerdy with me when I'm live ;)

Socials:

[Ken's Twitter](#)

[Ken's Tumblr](#)

[Ken's Twitch](#)

[Sophia's Twitter](#)

[Sophia's Twitch](#)

## Chapter Twenty-Seven || Year Four and a Half (Summer)

### Chapter Summary

Summer is here and Dream has an epiphany.

### Chapter Notes

lol hello again

Yes, it's been a million years. SORRYYYYYY real life sucks. But good news — we have another writer! Xeniality is now gonna be helping us write these chapters, so give them a warm welcome. Also, Sophia goes by Serotonin103 now. She would like everyone to know that she worked her ass off to get this chapter out (can confirm she did — none of this new chapter would have been possible without her).

Thank you to all the wonderful people who made fanart while we were gone! Here they are (let me know in the comments if I missed you):

Click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for art by Toffee!

Click [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for art by imapiratematey!

Click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for art by Ink!

Click [here](#) for art by fd5e53!

Click [here](#) for art by Kin!

Also...a spin-off! Check out [this](#) fic by BetweenDisorders!

With all that out of the way, enjoy the chapter! It's a long one :)

Love,  
Ken

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream's conversation with Minx about his summer plans had gone much better than he'd anticipated.

"Sure," Minx shrugged, propping her feet up on the coffee table in the common room. "I'll owl home."

Dream blinked. "Wha—really?"

"Sure."

"You're not gonna complain or, like, tell me to go fuck myself?" he asked, staring at her incredulously.

Minx scowled. "Do ye want teh feekin' come or not?"



“Yeah, yeah, sorry. I just thought I’d need to work *way* harder to convince you.”

“Having ye come over’s better than ‘avin’ ter spend a whole summer wi’ me awful fuckin’ family, Selwyn.”

Dream pursed his lips before shrugging his shoulders. “Good enough for me.”

Minx rolled her eyes and sat up with a huff. “I’ll ask ‘em now. I’d bet yeh a thousand galleons they’ll be over the fucking moon.”

As it turned out, Minx was right. When the owl returned with her parents’ reply the following morning, she skimmed the words before tossing the letter at Dream’s head.

“Ow, hey!” the Slytherin boy exclaimed, dropping his spoonful of oatmeal mid-bite. The utensil clattered loudly as it hit his plate and sent spatters of gray goop flying. “What the hell’s your problem?”

“Just read it.”

He unfolded the letter Minx had crumpled with gentle fingers, eyes taking in elegantly penned words written in an emerald green ink.

*Dearest Justine,*

*Provided that young Mr. Selwyn’s parents are in agreement, we would be delighted to host him at our manor over the summer holiday. If he’d like, we could even spend a week or two at our summer villa in Tarifa!*

*Love,*

*Mum and Dad*

He passed the letter back across the table once he finished reading. Minx snatched it back up and made a show of further crumpling the parchment into a ball before lobbing it across the Great Hall. Dream watched it land in some poor Gryffindor’s porridge.

“That’s not very considerate.”

“Oh, consider my arse, Selwyn.”

“Ugh, no thanks,” he waved his hands dramatically, “Sorry, Minx, but you’re not my type.”

“Oh, trust me, we all know *exactly* what your type is, Selwyn,” she snorted, sticking her tongue out at him. Dream glared at her.

“Oh, be nice, you two,” Niki admonished, summoning the soggy parchment ball back to the table with a wordless flick of her wand, letting it land with a wet ‘ *shlop* ’ on the table. “This is good news! Minx will have company AND you won’t have to go see your father, Dream!”

“Yeah,” Dream agreed, picking his spoon back up as he returned to his breakfast. “My dad’s probably gonna be thrilled. He’ll be so happy that I’m finally spending time with the ‘right crowd.’”

“You mean you haven’t already told him you’re not coming home?” Puffy inquired.

“Nope.”

“Won’t they be worried?”

“Doubt it. Plus, I’m sure Minx’s dad already told mine. Either way I don’t really care.”

Puffy looked concerned, and opened her mouth to question him further, but Niki silenced her with a quick flash of her eyes.

Dream was grateful. He had zero desire to discuss his parents. It was why he’d been so cryptic with the girls about the origins of the fresh pink scar that ripped across the side of his face—the shitshow that was his home life was something he preferred to keep to himself, despite the concern of his loving friends.

The remainder of the school year passed by in a stressful haze of schoolwork and exams. For the first time in his life, Dream was *happy* about his end of year workload. His brain was so full of Arithmancy equations and potion ingredients that he didn’t have the time or energy to worry about his old friend group or George, and avoiding his Ravenclaw classmates was surprisingly easy with Minx by his side.

When his final exam concluded — Muggles and Magicology, of all subjects — he was the second person out the classroom doors, right behind Minx. Niki and Puffy met them in the hall, a cupcake in each of their hands.

“Congratulations on finishing your fourth year!” Niki cheered, passing hers to Dream. “Here’s to three more!”

“OH MY GOD! Are these chocolate?” Minx screeched, snatching her own cupcake from Puffy. “The icing is a fucking work of art! Niki, sweetheart, ye shouldn’t ‘ave!”

Niki beamed at the Slytherin. “Yes, it’s your favourite, double chocolate! A reward for all of our hard work this year.”

“She used the brand-new colour-change-sparkle-sprinkles.” Puffy added with a smile, “Look!”

And when Dream squinted at the pastry, he noticed that the little bits of sugar were flickering between silver and green — Slytherin colours.

“Wow,” he said. “It almost looks too good to eat.”

“Noooo, that’s just silly! Try them!”

Dream was just about to sink his teeth into the beautifully decorated cake, someone behind their group cleared their throat. Dream turned around and was met with an awkward-looking Wilbur Soot twirling a quill between nimble fingers.

“Hey, Niki,” he greeted the Hufflepuff girl, only sparing a side glance at the rest of the group surrounding her. “Thanks for lending me the quill. I still really don’t understand why they wouldn’t let me write any of the exams with pens, but you know.”

“Oh, no problem! How was your exam, Wil?”

“Good! M&M isn’t my favourite subject, but what can a lad do? I wish Hogwarts offered a music course.”

“You could always join the frog choir,” Minx spat from the sidelines, hostility radiating from her.

Wilbur didn't look at or respond to her, but Dream noticed his cheeks flush none-the-less and there was an awkward pause that ensued, during which Minx spent glaring daggers at Wilbur menacingly. After a few miserable seconds, the Ravenclaw boy got the hint and bade Niki a speedy farewell.

"Yikes," Puffy muttered. Niki's smile faltered, and for the first time it occurred to Dream that she and Wilbur used to spend a lot more time together before his and Georges falling out.

As their group walked down the large corridors, heading towards the stairs that led to the Slytherin dungeons, Dream placed a hand on Niki's shoulder, holding her back for a moment.

"Hey, you know you can still be friends with Wilbur, right?"

Niki blinked, clearly confused. "Wilbur has always been my friend."

"I know, I know," he backtracked, "but like, you don't have to always sit with us and stuff. Just 'cuz I'm not on the best terms with, uh, you know..."

"Oh, yes, of course. Of course I know that. Please don't worry about me, okay? Me and Wilbur are great, so please don't worry." She smiled at Dream sadly before turning the corridor towards the Hufflepuff common room.

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The train's atmosphere was light. As Dream stepped into their compartment — not *the* compartment, he doubted he'd ever be welcomed by the Ravenclaws again — Dream couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief.

"We actually did it," he declared. "We made it through another year."

"Fuck yeah we did! And this summer is going to be awesome!" Puffy rejoiced.

They chatted as the train started its gentle motion and the castle out the window grew smaller and smaller and eventually disappeared from sight. Dream sighed as he took in the beautiful Scottish hillsides that spread out behind the thick train window and wondered what it would be like to run barefoot through the fluffy green grass.

"Yo, Dream, you good?" Puffy asked, nudging his leg with her foot.

"Hm—Wha? Yeah. I'm good."

"What're you thinking about?"

He pursed his lips. What *was* he thinking about?

"I guess I...I'm thinking about flying."

Minx snorted. "Flying?"

"Yeah," he retorted, "ya know, like, on a broom?"

"Shut up, Minx," Puffy waved her hand at her. "What do you mean flying?"

“Yeah,” Dream explained, “I dunno, I guess I’m looking out this window thinking, ‘what would it be like to just...get on a broom and fly away?’”

“Fly where?” Niki asked.

“I don’t know. Just away. Above the ocean might be nice. Just think — twenty hours on a good broom, up the coast through the cold wind. Nothing but me and the birds.”

When he turned back to look at the girls, all three were staring at him quizzically.

“Fuckin weirdo,” Minx muttered.

“That sounds...hellish?” Puffy responded. “Flying for *twenty hours*? Straight? In the cold wind? Are you *sure* you’re good, dude?”

Minx muttered something to herself under her breath and chuckled. Dream ignored her.

“Wh—? *Yes* I’m good. That doesn’t sound...I don’t know, romantic to you guys?”

The girls burst into giggles. Dream spluttered, turning his head awkwardly and trying to hide his blush.

“R-romantic?!” Minx spluttered. “Didn’t take ye for the *romantic* type, Dream. Who’s the lucky boy?”

“WHAT?! Boy- wha- I- I didn’t mean like *romantic* romantic, I just meant- ya know? SHUT UP MINX!” his attempts at saving himself were futile, and the girls just kept on giggling, Minx had collapsed into Puffy, her sides heaving.

“If I’d known you were feeling *romantic* I would’ve tried to set you up with someone!” Said Puffy, gleefully. “You know that Hufflepuff kid in my year with the ears who’s always making excuses to come up to our table in the great hall? He *totally* has a crush on you, Dream, and he’s cute! I should send him an owl and be like, ‘Hey, Fundy, Dream just told me he’s looking for someone to go on a long romantic broom ride up the coast with! You should shoot your shot!’”

“Ooh, I remember him! Wasn’t he dating Feye Vupp, you know, the Slytherin?” Niki asked.

“Eh, not like, *actually* dating. Yet at least. So far Fundy has *exclusively* dated blonds, Dream, you’re totally his type.”

“I’m not into furry little third-years,” Dream grumbled, turning his head to look out the window again, entirely flustered.

“Well, if not ‘furry little third-years, then what?’” Niki questioned, her eyes shining with mischief.

Something stalled in Dream’s brain as he searched for an answer to give. There seemed to be a block somewhere, and all he could think of was:

“I’m taken,” he huffed, giving the cat on his lap a scratch under her chin. “Patches gets *all* my love. Don’t you, Pumpkin?”

“*Laaaame*,” Puffy groaned.

“She’s the only one for me!” He declared, raising an imaginary sword as though he were a knight protecting his princess.

“Okay Dream,” Minx smirked. “Ye can’t hide yer feelings forever. Ey, Puffy, d’ye want to play a game with me?”

The girls soon began to play a complicated game which involved Minx and Puffy taking turns aiming Bertie Bott’s every flavor beans into each other’s open mouths while Niki kept score of how many beans each person caught successfully.

I’d been going on for at least an hour when Minx had thrown a foul-colored bean right down Puffy’s throat, who, in turn, proceeded to choke and then grimace.

“Ha!” Minx, pointing at Puffy. “That was a bad flavor! Give me another point, Niki!”

“It was *not* a bad flavor,” Puffy lied. “Don’t you dare give her the extra point.”

“Oh yeah? What did it taste like?”

“Uh...chocolate.”

“Liar! The bean wasn’t even brown, you eejit, it was yellow!”

“It was *lemon* chocolate!”

“You look like yer about to vomit, Puffy, there’s no fecking way that was *lemon chocolate*. Lemon chocolate isn’t even a fuckin thing.”

“YES IT IS.”

“Oh come on now,” Dream added from his seat by the window, highly amused by the scene playing out before him.

“Ugh! Fine. I think it was rotten cabbage or something.”

“AHA! I fucking knew it! An extra point for me!”

Eventually, Dream nodded off to the sounds of Minx and Puffy’s banter.

When he woke up hours later, it was to Patches’ butt in his face as the cat attempted to put both her front paws on the window, trying to watch the passing birds.

“Here,” Dream mumbled, lifting the feline up so she could have a clear view of the outside world. “Better?”

“She must be able to tell that we’re close to the station,” Niki said. “We should be at Kings Cross in a couple minutes.”

Sure enough, the Hogwarts Express pulled up to the platform about ten minutes later. The friends all stretched as they stood up from their seats.

Soon, Puffy and Niki had gathered their things and met their parents on the platform, waving goodbye to Minx and Dream for the summer.

“I’ll miss them,” Dream sighed. Minx’s eyes followed Puffy until she disappeared from view.

“Yeah. Me too. Now where’s Miffy?”

Dream furrowed his eyebrows. “You mean your parents don’t come to pick you up?” he asked.

Minx turned and shot him a very annoyed look. “Do yours?” she snapped.

“No, shit, I’m sorry. Mine always sent our elf.”

“Yea, thought so ye fuckin prick. Come on, I see her. Get yer shit.”

They trudged over to where Minx’s elf was waiting, clad only in a torn willowy pillowcase. When they were level with the House-elf, she snapped her fingers, instantly vanishing their luggage.

“Hello, Miss Minx and Master Selwyn. Is Master and Miss ready to apparate with Miffy to the Manor? Master and Missus Minx is very pleased to be expecting your company!”

Minx grumbled something grouchy and indistinguishable as she took hold of one of Miffy’s boney arms. “Let’s fucking get outta here, already. I need a nap in me own fucking bed after months of sleeping on glorified cardboard.”

“What do you mean?” Dream asked as he trailed along behind her. “I think the beds are nice.”

“Well then you either have shite taste in mattresses or McGonagall feckin hates me and gave me a rock to sleep on on purpose,” she grunted, “or both. Probably both. Merlin, I hate that witch.”

Miffy disapparated with them both as soon as Dream took hold of her shrivelled, bony hand. It’d been a while since Dream travelled by side along apparition, and he couldn’t say he missed it at all. They emerged in the front yard of Minx Manor, the large mansion standing imposingly before them. Even though he’d seen it before, Dream’s eyes still widened at its grandeur.

“I’m fucking *starved*,” Minx announced, stomping through the front door. “There better be something to eat inside or I swear to Merlin I’ll resort to cannibalism.” She pointed her finger at Dream and mouthed something that looked like *you first, bitch*. Dream put his hand to his heart and feigned hurt.

“Harsh.” She stuck her tongue out at him.

Finding food was not a problem, as it turned out. When Dream stepped inside the house, he was greeted with an entire buffet already spread out across the long dining room table. His mouth watered at the sight.

“Clay!” Minx’s mother appeared from one of the manor’s many corridors, a wineglass held delicately between manicured fingers. “It’s such a joy to see you, my dear! Please, please, wash up and take a seat. Justine’s Father and I have been waiting eagerly for your arrival — I’ll go fetch him now.”

“Oh, thanks, Mrs. Minx. Can I change out of my school robes first?”

“Call me Jonathena, and of course darling! I’ll have Miffy show you to your room. It’s the one up the stairs and at the end of the hall.”

Their House-elf was quick to beckon Dream to follow her. He trailed her past portrait after fancy portrait and tapestry after tapestry until they arrived at a large spruce door.

“Your bed chambers, Master Selwyn. If you must need anything, you is free to always be calling on Miffy!” the elf squeaked.

“Uhm, thanks, Miffy,” Dream said kindly. “You can leave me alone to change now, though. Tell Mrs. Minx I’ll be out in a bit. Uh, please.”

Miffy nodded and obediently trotted back down the hall, closing the heavy doors behind her with a *swish* of her hand and leaving Dream and Patches to explore their new room alone.

The guest room he would be staying in held a bed larger than any in his parents' house. Fluffy white pillows lined the intricately carved wooden headboard, silently beckoning Dream to come lay his head down and sleep the rest of the evening away. Instead, however, he marched up to the foot of his bed and bent over to unlatch the clasps on his trunk.

A change of clothes and a quick dewrinkling spell later — he knew he wasn't allowed to practice magic outside of school, but nobody would know, as he was in a magical house — Dream was ready for dinner. He left the door of his room open a crack in case Patches felt like exploring the expanse of the manor, then made his way back to the grand dining room.

The whole family was seated by the time he returned to the table. He bashfully went to sit down, but a House-elf pulled his chair out for him before he could touch it.

"Thank you," he said, kindly. Mrs. Selwyn broke the tension by letting out a laugh.

"Oh, isn't he a dear? Do you always thank the elves, Clay, or are you just trying to impress Justine's parents?" she asked him, winking. Minx groaned.

"Mum, can't we fuckin eat already?"

"Mind your words, Justine," snapped the man at the head of the table, who could only be Minx's father. The wizard shook his head disapprovingly before turning to Dream and saying, "ah- that's our Justine for ye. All bark and no bite. I s'pose ye know that already, though, given how close the two o' ye are."

"No bite? Oh, I can bite, believe me—"

"So, Clay," interrupted Minx's sister, "ye 'ave a cat? What's her name?"

Another of the Minxs' elves poured wine into his glass as he responded. "Patches," he answered. "She's the best."

"Ye only say that because ye 'aven't met Sylum and Cornelius yet. Those two are just beautiful, aren't they, Mother?"

"They are. We bought them as kittens from a breeder in Paris. What breed is yers, Clay?"

Dream scratched his head. "Uh...I don't know. Tabby, I think. Is tabby a breed?"

"Hmm," Jennifer sniffed distastefully. "Ye never know with the strays."

He bristled at the remark but knew better than to defend his cat when he was at his first dinner with arguably one of the most powerful wizarding families of his age. Luckily, Mr. Minx moved on before Dream could say something he'd regret later.

"I must admit, I was surprised to hear of your arrival, Clay. Your father hadn't mentioned anything about it to me until Justine's letter arrived. He was real pleased that ye'd be stayin' with us — 'e said ye can stay as long as ye'd like."

"Or as long as we'd ave ye," Jennifer added.

"Which might very well be for all 'o summer!" Mrs. Minx declared warmly. "Ye should feel at

home ‘ere. Our manor is yer manor.”

“Except my room,” said a little boy across the table from Dream. The child looked just like Minx — his big blue eyes bored into Dream’s like a stern warning. “I don’t want ‘im in me room.”

“No one would want to go in yer stinkin feckin’ room in the first place,” Minx snapped. The younger boy stuck his tongue out at her.

Mrs. Minx tutted and gestured towards the table spread. “Oh, Clay, don’t mind them. Justine and Jarlath are lovely when they’re not at each other’s throats. Though I’m sure ye know all about younger siblings — how is the little Drista?”

The rest of the dinner passed in a stream of idle chatter between bites of their decadent meal. By the end of the evening, Dream was full and exhausted. He was grateful when Minx’s parents dismissed the children to their rooms.

That night, Dream discovered that his bed was even comfier than it looked.

He took advantage of the mattress’ size and stretched his ever-growing limbs to all four bedposts until he resembled a starfish he once found on the shore of a Florida beach back when he was just a little boy. Moonlight spilled across Dream’s pillows, flowing in through the sizable window he’d regret leaving open the next day. The moon cast the room in an ethereal glow, giving everything it touched a pearly sheen. If he closed his eyes, Dream could almost convince himself that nothing else existed except for him, in that moment, with the moon.

He liked being able to do that — to make everything disappear, just for a moment.

The thick ivory quilt with which he’d been given to sleep lay crumpled and abandoned at his feet, the fabric twisted into a tangled heap. The weather was that awkward temperature where it was too hot to sleep with a blanket but too cold to sleep without one, so Dream decided to let the icy air seep under his skin and into his pores.

If George were in the bed with him, he’d tell him to sleep with one leg under the covers and one exposed to the cool air. George was like that — rational, always trying to find balance where Dream only saw hard shades of black and white.

Dream was different. Dream wasn’t George, and he wasn’t what George wanted him to be. Dream was all or nothing, and maybe that’s why their friendship was destined to fall apart.

But no, that wasn’t quite right. It had been *George* who pushed him away, *George* who told him he couldn’t have anything to do with his father if they were to remain friends. This time, George had been the one who’d demanded all or nothing, and Dream had chosen not to leave his little sister in the dust.

Dream wasn’t evil. Caring about his baby sister, his own flesh and blood, didn’t make him a bad person. It didn’t make him a monster.

It hurt that George, of all people, couldn’t see that.

He rolled over, then, and wished the room were less quiet. The walls of Minx Manor must have been enchanted with some sort of muffling spell which prevented any noises from entering his ears. The silence seemed louder than anything he’d ever experienced, and in the silence, Dream found himself longing for the random creaks and owl hoots that served as his lullaby back at Hogwarts. He didn’t even have the comforting rumble of Patches’ purrs to soothe him — the feline had wandered off to explore her new surroundings.

With nothing to distract him, his thoughts spiraled, leading him back down the sterile white corridors of his father's laboratory and the room in his mind he preferred to keep locked up so he didn't have to hear the tortured screams of those inside.

He didn't want to think about it. He *never* wanted to think about it, about *him*, that poor, poor boy, ever again. But Dream had no choice — he had a conscience, a crummy, crumbling conscience, but a conscience nonetheless. And not a night passed without his conscience punishing him for the person he'd failed.

Ranboo. Ranboo, Ranboo, *Ranboo* ...

It didn't matter that Dream was just a stupid, powerless kid, didn't matter that he was helpless, didn't matter that everything would have gone to shit anyway. None of that mattered. None of it mattered to George and none of it mattered to Dream and none of it mattered to Ranboo. Nothing would ever matter to Ranboo again. Ranboo was dead, dead, *dead*, nothing but a discarded laboratory specimen left to rot in a cell far away from home.

And it was all Dream's fault.

Dream didn't *deserve* George. He didn't deserve kindness. He didn't deserve the bed beneath his body and the delicious food making its way through his digestive system that felt like it was suddenly about to come back up and the friend who'd graciously allowed him a place to stay after his piece of shit father drove him out of his home.

He wished he and Ranboo could switch places.

Dream couldn't sleep for a long time, stinging tears pricked at the corners of his eyes and slid silently down his freckled cheeks. When he finally drifted into something resembling a slumber, his sleep was haunted by familiar faces.

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He kept to himself most of the next day; Minx somehow knew not to bother him much. He only emerged when Miffy called on him for meals.

Minx's parents, he found out, were rarely home. The family dinner they'd had the night of Dream's arrival had been a rare occurrence, a special event put on for the guest and then never repeated, which was fine by Dream. When he asked Minx where her parents disappeared to all day, the girl levelled him with one of her customary glares before stalking off to her room.

And in all in between moments, when he wasn't eating or sleeping, Dream was torturing himself.

He thought that if he just removed himself from his problems and took some time to process his emotions, he'd feel better. He thought that a physical detachment would help ease his guilt or clear his head, but his traitorous brain didn't seem to get the message.

Every night was hell, and in his misery, his days became hell, too. Minx left him to his own devices, giving him nothing to do but swim in a pool of his own sickly thoughts. Ranboo and George's faces came to him like visions, yelling and crying and screaming in pain. By the end of his first week, nobody could convince him that he was anything less than a monster.

On the bright side, Patches was having the time of her little kitty life.

Every morning at the manor began with a cat parade, usually led by Queen Patches herself. She would enter Dream's room after a night of adventuring with Minx's cats happily trotting in after her, sometimes with an unfortunate mouse or small bird hanging from their mouths.

On one particular morning, Patches and the other two members of her pussy posse managed to capture a very large rabbit. After pawing Dream's door open, the three felines sauntered into his room and deposited the animal on Dream's chest, much to his dismay.

"Uhhh...thanks," Dream said, wrinkling his nose at the 'gift.'

"Mrreow!" Patches replied.

When he attempted to gingerly remove the poor creature's corpse from him, it sprang to life, immediately hopping from his chest, to the nightstand and then to the top of the armoire, commencing another hunt of epic proportions.

Dream kept his door closed at night after that.

It was weird without Patches, but feeling a little lonely was better than waking up to animal corpses lying on his chest.

Dream didn't like closing himself off. The shut door reminded him of the fact that he was lonely and sad and a miserable waste of space. But no one in the manor ever commented on it.

Until one night when he had a particularly awful nightmare.

He'd been walking down a narrow, dimly-lit hallway. The only sounds which reached his ears were the steady *clop, clop, clops* of his own footsteps echoing off the walls.

The corridor went on forever. Every step forward brought him no closer to its end while simultaneously making it harder for him to justify turning back. Floating candles cast eerie shadows which surrounded him, seemingly moving of their own volitions.

The scene was repetitive in a way that made his skin crawl.

But then he heard it: the unmistakable sound of crying.

Suddenly, his journey through the dark took on a new sense of urgency and he was running. He sprinted until his lungs were burning and his legs were cramping from the effort but he kept on pushing because he *knew* those cries. He'd grown up with those cries. Heck, he'd *caused* those cries before.

The wailing grew louder.

Finally after what felt like a million years he saw a door. It stood there at the end of the hallway intimidatingly, the only thing standing between him and his destiny.

He threw the door open. The crying stopped.

"Drista?" he called out into the dark room before him. He reached for his wand but found it absent from his robe pocket.

"Dweam," the darkness called back.

“Drista!”

And Dream was soon stumbling forward, arms stretched out desperately, searching blindly in the dark for his little sister. He called her name over and over again like they were playing a twisted game of Marco Polo.

The lights suddenly flickered on. And then his search was over.

Drista sat hunched over in the corner, tears streaking her face. When she looked up at Dream, her eyes were red.

Dream watched in horror as her little body began convulsing. Her matted blonde hair began to turn black and her skin took on a deep shade of purple. Soon she was screaming in agony, clutching at her face and crying shimmering white tears.

“DREAM!” she screeched. “HELP ME! IT HURTS!”

Dream lunged towards her but was thrown back by some invisible force. A glass barrier was suddenly placed in between them, rendering him a helpless observer to his sister’s pain.

“YOU LEFT ME!” Drista cried as her fingertips began to turn yellow. “YOU LET THEM HURT ME!”

“I’m sorry!” Dream screamed back, “I didn’t want to! I’M SORRY!”

“WAKE UP!”

“I’M SORRY!”

“GODDAMNIT, WAKE UP!”

He opened his eyes, and Drista was gone.

He was back in the guest bedroom in Minx Manor, lying in a large comfy bed with a pillow beneath his head and a warm duvet tangled around his legs. After catching his breath, he noticed there was someone else in the room, too.

“Minx?” he whispered, eyes struggling to make out the girl’s features in the darkness. “Is that you?”

“No. Of *course* it’s fucking me, eejit,” she whispered back.

“Wh...what are you doing here?”

“Stopping you from waking the entire fecking house up with yer feckin screamin, that’s what!”

Dream sat up, pulling the duvet up over his knees. “I was screaming?” He furrowed his eyebrows, noticing that his voice indeed felt scratchy.

Though he couldn’t see her very well, he could tell that Minx was rolling her eyes. “Ye were screamin’ bloody fuckin murder.”

“Oh.”

Dream shuffled awkwardly, not knowing what to say. Eventually, Minx leaned forward and put a hand on his shoulder, shocking him, slightly.

“I— ye were goin feckin crazy, mate. How bad was that dream, Dream?”

Dream didn't say anything, keeping a steady gaze on the faded dancing flowers embroidered into the beds linens.

“Ye just— I can— can I hug you?” she murmured. “When I was little, me mam used to hug me when I had nightmares. I dunno, thought It might help.”

He looked up at her, tensing at the thought of needing a hug from *Minx* of all people; and rejection was on the tip of his tongue. But while his mind was firmly against the idea, Dream's heart betrayed him and he nodded.

And then her arms were around him.

The hug was firm and surprisingly nice. Minx held him tightly but not overly so, using just enough pressure to make him feel secure, but not enough that he felt trapped in her embrace. After a moment's hesitation, he returned the gesture, looping his arms loosely around her hunched form.

After about a minute, they parted. By the time the hug was over, Dream's breathing and heart rate had calmed significantly.

“Hm,” he hummed, not able to think of anything to say at all.

“It helps, doesn't it?”

“Yeah..”

“It's the pressure, I think. It calms yer nerves. You can buy blankets enchanted teh feel heavy when you sleep — or ye can enchant em yeself — it helps a lot with nightmares.”

Dream nodded. “I'll look into it.”

“Yeah.” Minx took a deep breath, seemingly contemplating what to say next. “D'ye want to talk about it?”

“Uh...not really,” Dream replied guiltily. “It was pretty messed up.”

“Hmm, let me guess. George? Family drama?”

At the mention of his former best friend, Dream's body made a twitching movement, almost trying to move him away from the thought of George. Someone he couldn't bear to think about at the moment. He felt that if he did, the world would come crashing down.

“Er, no. Not George.”

“So family drama then. I feckin knew it,” she tutted. “Although, judging by the way you reacted to the mention of my dear ex-boyfriend, I'd say he's on yer mind, too.”

Dream said nothing, his eyes moving back to his floral bedsheets. His silence was enough of an answer for Minx, who reached over and lightly punched Dream's leg in what was probably meant to be a comforting gesture.

“Why?”

“Excuse me?”

“Why do you spend so much time thinking about them when they don’t want to be around you?” she probed. “Ye ‘ave new friends now. Ye ‘ave me an’ Puffy an’ Niki. Ye still ‘ave Schlatt and some other Slytherins, too. Why d’ye waste yer mental energy on people who won’t give ye the time of day?”

“I...I don’t *know*. ”

“I think ye do know.”

“No, I don’t. I...”

Dream trailed off, closing his eyes. If he weren’t embarrassed by the thought, he would have asked Minx for another hug.

“I’m...I’m *hurt*,” he admitted, shrugging his shoulders. “I feel like I’m trying to do the right thing but it just isn’t enough for them. For George. No matter my reasoning they’ll—he’ll never think I’m trying hard enough, nobody will. But I *am*, I’m trying *so hard*. It’s just not fair.”

Minx was quiet.

“Ugh, I’m sorry,” Dream muttered. “I sound like a whiny baby.”

“Yea well, ye always sound like that.”

Dream moved his eyes to shoot her a quick glare.

“I understand, ye know. More than ye think. I’ve ‘ad to go through the exact same shit with my stupid fuckin’ family,” she murmured. “It’s fuckin’ *ard*. Ye spend yer life thinkin’ one thing an’ then ye go teh school and yer world just changes. And people who didn’t grow up like we did just can’t understand that.”

Dream nodded. “And if I complain about it or try to talk to George or any of the others in that group, they can only seem to see it all as morally black or white and it’s like...I’m grey, I’m just grey.” He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “I’m a gray little rich boy who’s just starting to understand how fucked up the world is.”

Minx yawned and stretched out her arms, yielding several satisfying *pop* s. “At some point, ye just ‘ave to stop playing the game. Y’ave to stop letting *them* bein teh ones who put down the rules, because as long as they’re the ones making the rules ye can never win. Even when ye feel like yer winning, ye never are, and ye never will be.”

“But what does that even *mean*?”

“It means when yer dad says *anything* vaguely WAP-ish, ye shut that shit down. Ye just don’t give ‘em a chance to get any words in. Don’t ever let them get one foot in the door, because if they do they’ll kick it down and get in yer head.”

Dream sighed. “But...there’s something else, too,” he muttered. When Minx cocked an eyebrow in response, he continued, “Drista’s a squib.”

The information sat there heavily between them for a moment.

Until Minx finally shrugged.

“Figures.”

“What?”

“It isn’t exactly surprising, innit? Squibs are as common as the mumblemumps in pureblood families now. Plus, it explains why yer dad puts so much in teh it.”

“But don’t you see how it makes things more complicated for me? I mean, she’s not just any squib, Minx, she’s my *sister*. ”

“Yeah, and Jennifer is *my* sister, unfortunately. She’s a squib, too, ye know. So’s me brother.”

Now *that* gave Dream something to think about.

“You mean...Jennifer and Jarlath a-are squibs?”

Minx nodded. “Mum thought Jennifer was a one-in-a-million, unfortunate accident, because a few years later I was born with magic. So when Jarlath turned seven and still showed no signs ‘o bein’ a wizard...ye can guess how that went.”

Dream grimaced. “Oof.”

“Yeah ‘oof’ is the right word. It was pretty shit.”

“But they’re so...accepted. I mean, your parents act so nice to them.”

Minx snorted. “What’re they going to do, disown two-thirds of their own offspring? It’d look shameful. Besides, they’re in utter denial. They’re convinced there’ll be a cure soon. It’s why they’re so enthusiastic about yer dad’s project. But d’ye know what?”

“...What?”

“Any time I hear ‘em so much as *whisper* the word ‘cure,’ I fuckin’ shut that shit down.”

“You might as well be talking to a brick wall, though.”

“Would ye rather talk to a brick wall, or a bunch o’ feckin blood purists?”

“I didn’t mean it like—”

“Exactly.” Minx yawned and stood up, lighting a path for herself with a whispered *Lumos*. “I’m fuckin’ tired. Goodnight, eejit. And good talk.”

Before she crossed the doorway, Dream stopped her. “Wait,” he said.

Minx turned around expectantly. Dream stammered before he got it out.

“...Another hug?”

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After that night, something in their relationship shifted.

They were still weird and awkward at times, and Minx continued to snap at him and be a bit of a

bitch — she was *Minx*, after all — but Dream felt a new sense of mutual understanding. She understood him, and he knew that now.

After a week or two, they fell into a familiar summer routine.

Minx would wake Dream up in the morning by jumping on his bed and shouting at him aggressively until Dream whacked her with his pillow and forced her out the door. They'd then summon Miffy to Minx's room and request a tray of breakfast which they would eat together in one of their rooms so they could avoid conversations with the rest of the household. After that, the two of them would spend the rest of the day doing whatever the hell they felt like, which most of the time consisted of wandering the manor's sprawling grounds.

Dream looked forward to their walks. At first the two had been awkward, unsure how to handle this new stage of their friendship. Eventually, though, they came to enjoy each other's company and would spend hours talking about everything from their favorite quidditch players to the disastrous state of the wizarding world. The estate made for scenic walks — there were countless small ponds, magical fountains, talking toadstools, lifelike sculptures, and magical creatures to admire outside. Though she'd grown up in the manor, with Dream's help, Minx discovered something new and exciting on the grounds every day.

One of those discoveries changed their newly-established routine entirely. On a sunny Tuesday at the end of July, the two came across a broom cupboard on the edge of one of the estate's grassy fields. They'd swung the doors open at the earliest opportunity and were delighted to find half a dozen old professional racing brooms covered in thick layers of dust.

Though neither of them were very good at quidditch, they had endless free time on their hands and loads of enthusiasm. It was then that they decided to put their minds to the sport and master it once and for all.

Once they'd spent hours figuring out which brooms suited them best, they were off. They devoted an entire evening to chasing each other around the grounds, never going higher than six feet in the air — neither of them were quite ready for *that* aspect of the sport.

Over dinner that evening, Minx asked her father where the brooms were from. Mr. Minx seemed reluctant to say much about their origins, but he *did* give them explicit permission to use the brooms to their hearts' content.

Over the next week, they continued to practice basic flying, Minx on an old Nimbus 2001 and Dream on an old 1996 Air Wave Gold racing broom that had practically jumped into his hand when he went to grab it for the first time in the cupboard. Little by little, the two Slytherins got better. By the end of their second week of practice, they were able to successfully catch and throw the quaffle without losing their balance.

In fact, Dream seemed to have a knack for chasing. Though his stomach churned at the thought of performing any daring manoeuvres hundreds of feet above ground, he had a strong throw and handled the old racing broom with ease. Minx found it difficult to keep pace with him.

Minx, on the other hand, fell in love with beating. Her pent-up aggression made beating bludgers a cathartic experience, and Dream acquired quite the number of bruises during their practises as a result of her passionate swings.

On one sunny day halfway through their summer break, the two friends lay sprawled in the shade beneath a large and withered apple tree, panting and covered in sweat. The sun was already starting to set in the sky, casting long shadows across their faces and the grass around them.

Minx's stomach growled loudly. Dream giggled.

"We forgot to eat lunch again," he noted.

Minx snorted. "More like we sent the poor elf away when she tried to make us eat."

"Did we do that?"

"Yeah, but ye were too busy gettin' hit by bludgers to notice."

Dream was too tired to fire back at the comment, so he just stuck his middle finger up at her.

Minx lazily reached around behind her head, picking up a glossy red apple from the grass and taking a loud bite out of it. After several moments of wet crunching, she swallowed and glanced at him.

"Do ye think yer goin to tryout for the team when we go back?"

"Nah," Dream answered without hesitation. "Two months of practice isn't gonna get me on the team. Maybe I'll reconsider in a year when there are more open positions."

Minx grunted in response. "So yer gonna practice durin the year too?"

"If I can find the time for it. We *are* going into our O.W.L. year." He hesitated before probing, "Why? You wanna join the team?"

"Pah!" she let out a laugh, spraying Dream with bits of apple. "Like GB would ever quit the team. I'd never get teh beater."

"There are two beaters on a quidditch team, Minx. Plus, I'm sure they need backup players."

"I've too much pride to be a *backup player*. Anyway, being on the team is so much work," she groaned. "I like just sittin' in the stands and watching Technoblade lose to us slimy green fucks."

"What!?" Dream laughed disbelievingly. "Techno is the best player at Hogwarts. If anything, us slimy green fucks lose to *him*."

"Ye only say that because yer mind's been addled by love," Minx grumbled.

"Love?" Dream repeated, utterly perplexed.

"Love."

"You're saying you think I'm in love with Dave Technoblade?"

"God, yer so feckin stupid!" she punctuated the statement with a punch to Dream's shoulder. "Not Techno, ye eejit, a *different* Ravenclaw boy."

Dream's face heated up. "Oh. Nope."

"Yer in love with—"

"Don't you dare—"

"—George *feckin* Davidson."

"No, no, no!" Dream yelled, springing up into a seated position. "Tell me how the fuck being in

love with George relates at all to me thinking Techno is a good chaser!”

“Ha! Ye’ve admitted it!” Minx cackled triumphantly.

“What the fuck, Minx? I haven’t admitted shit!”

“Ye did! Ye said yer in love with George!” Minx sat up to face him, a mischievous gleam in her eye. “Yer in *loooove* with him. Ye want teh marry him an’ kiss him an’ touch his—”

Minx didn’t get to finish her sentence because Dream tackled her to the ground.

“I am *not* in love with George,” he said through gritted teeth. “Fucking— You take that back.”

From her position pinned beneath him, Minx met his eyes evenly. Something like pity shone through her gaze.

“Dream.”

“What?!” he demanded. and to his embarrassment, he felt a warm flush creeping up the back of his neck.

“Dream, yer blushing.”

Unwilling to look her in the eyes any longer, Dream let Minx go and retreated to the other side of the apple tree. After a moment, he heard her sigh.

“Look Dream, I’m sorry. I didn’t—”

“It’s fine. Just—stop.”

And surprisingly, she stopped.

An awkward pause settled in between them. Eventually, Miffy came to fetch them for dinner, which they obediently ate at the table with the rest of the Minx family.

All throughout dinner and long after Dream had showered and retreated to his room for the night, Minx’s words echoed in his mind. Frankly, her teasing from earlier was all he could think about.

He knew that people always joked about him and George. Their classmates always made comments about how they were dating or boyfriends or in love or whatever, but they were never *serious*. It was all a big joke, something that happened with all best friends. The boyfriend comments were a natural byproduct of how close they were.

Dream wasn’t in love with George. He couldn’t be.

George was...George. He was his best friend. *And* a dude.

Plus, Dream wasn’t *gay*. He was straight.

Wasn’t he?

The proclamation, for some reason, made him uncomfortable. He squirmed underneath the bedsheets before throwing them off himself completely and flopping onto his stomach.

He liked girls, not guys. So what if he’d never had a girlfriend, or if he’d never had a crush on a girl — he wasn’t even fifteen yet. Did fifteen-year-olds even feel attraction? Was that, like, an

expected thing?

Attraction was a weird concept, and the longer he thought about the word, the more images began to flood his brain one after another.

George, smiling at him from across the table in the Great Hall.

George, his face flushed from cold and exertion, laughing as he pelted a snowball at Dream's head.

George, with his chocolate waves messed about with bedhead, his eyes heavily lidded and his lips swollen from sleep.

George, looking up at him through long fluttering brown lashes after telling him he looked good in green—

Dream's heart betrayed his innermost thoughts, beginning to beat rapidly against his ribcage.

He'd never kissed anyone in his life. He'd never wanted to. He tried picturing it — leaning towards some nameless girl, lips puckered in preparation — and then winced at the mental image.

No, kissing didn't appeal to him at all.

But then something odd happened. The nameless girl in his fantasy morphed into someone with shorter, darker hair. Her eyes took on a familiar shape and chocolate brown hue, and her smile transformed into one Dream had seen thousands of times before.

Suddenly, this dream version of Dream held soft cheeks in his hands and leaned forward, closing the distance between him and the mystery girl, only it was no longer a mystery girl — it was George, and *oh god he was imagining kissing his best friend.*

And he didn't want it to stop.

Dream was no expert, but that didn't seem like heterosexual behavior.

But fantasizing about kissing his best friend didn't necessarily make him *gay*, nor did it mean he was in love with George. So what if he'd never had crushes on girls? So what if he stared a little too long at the advertisements in the *Daily Prophet* that pictured smiling men with dark eyes and chiseled jawlines? So what if his eyes lingered on George's lips and cute upturned nose and fluffy brown hair that was begging to have Dream card his fingers through it...

And then, his mind flashed further back to the time that he'd mentally tried on his best friend's last name in the shower. At the time, he'd scoffed at the idea of being Dream Davidson, but *this* time he allowed himself to consider all that it entailed.

Him and George. Happy. Together forever, never out of reach of the others embrace, hugging whenever they felt like it and sleeping cuddled together. Kissing. Now that he'd finally let the idea slip between his tangled webs of thoughts, there seemed to be nothing he wanted more in the world than to be able to kiss George.

The thought didn't repulse him. No, Dream found the fantasy painfully appealing.

He rolled over onto his side, clutching an extra pillow to his chest tightly. Maybe the pillow could be George one day, pressed against Dream's front in a way that let him inhale the sweet scent of his best friend as they both fell into a blissful sleep.

Perhaps Dream *was* gay. Or, at least not straight.

And maybe...maybe he *did* like George. A lot.

Fuck.

Dream knew he wouldn't be able to get back to sleep anytime soon, so he decided to get himself a glass of water to rehydrate his very dry throat. He carefully padded through the manor's dark halls en route to the kitchen sink, purposefully staring straight ahead to avoid making unwanted eye contact with any of the portraits on the walls. Just as he was about to step out into the dining room area, he heard muffled voices coming from somewhere ahead of him and stopped in his tracks.

Was it wrong to eavesdrop? Yeah, obviously. Would the Minxs be angry with him if he was caught? Most likely.

But Dream's curiosity got the best of him. So, not even daring to breathe, he inched forward until he was able to detect the source of the noise: the very kitchen towards which he was headed.

Soon, he was able to pick out individual words and voices.

"...a threat to us, William!"

"What would ye've me do? We can't *Avada* the bloody wagon, now, can we?"

Dream's face paled. The voices continued their hushed argument.

"That wench is too loud fer her own good! Can't Selwyn—?"

"*Shhh*, Jonathena, my god! His boy's in our house!"

At the mention of his father, Dream's heart skipped a beat. He made himself take a deep breath before continuing to listen.

"...already 'ave a plan. We jus' 'ave to wait for our chance."

"The plan is hippogriff shite! I'll speak with Selwyn meself if ye don't!"

"Trust me for once in yer Merlin-damned life. Everything is under control. She won't be at it for much longer."

Suddenly, Dream decided he'd heard enough. No longer willing to make a trip to the kitchen, he simply made his way back to his room and summoned Miffy, who immediately fetched him a glass of water with a snap of her little elf fingers.

He chugged the water in seconds, but his head was still swimming with what he'd overheard.

The Minxs were planning something. And from the sound of it, they were planning something deadly.

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Dream hardly slept that night. He lay curled up under his quilted blankets, thinking. His brain couldn't choose what to focus on, switching between flashes of George and whoever the Minxs had been talking about. When he finally fell into an unsettling sleep, he was forced to watch the day's revelations turn into horrors of the night.

In his dreams, George and the mysterious face of the victim of the Minxs' wrath merged together. The screams of the Ravenclaw boy were still ringing in his ears when he finally woke up in a cold sweat at sunrise.

He stayed in his room for the rest of the day, watching the grounds of the manor through his grand bedroom window. His eyes kept searching the outside, though he didn't know what he was looking for — Minx flying around, perhaps, or an elf tending the gardens — but he had no such luck. Dream only knew what he didn't want to see, and that was George. He wanted to stare out the window until his nightmares about his best friend were a distant memory.

So he stared. He watched crows and sparrows flit about under a baby blue sky until clouds rolled in and it started to rain. He kept his eyes glued to the glass window panes as the droplets ran down them in quick succession.

Eventually, Patches turned up, pushing his door open nimbly with her paw and jumping into bed with him. She lay her head on his chest and began to purr directly above his beating heart.

The sky had turned dark again when there was a soft knock on the door. Dream grunted and rolled over towards the window, pushing Patches off in the process. She looked at him, clearly offended, before stalking out of his room with her tail high in the air.

"Yeah, Minx, come in," he groaned.

"Well that's a relief innit?" said the fellow Slytherin, sliding into the room and shutting the bedroom door behind her. "Why's it so bleedin dark in 'ere?" She waved her wand at the lights turned on instantly. Dream blinked rapidly at the stark change.

"What do you want, Minx?" he grumbled with his face still buried in his pillow.

"To see if yer okay, that's what." She sat down on his bed and pushed him over to make more room for herself, stretching out her long limbs and leaning against his headboard. "What the fuck is wrong, Selwyn?"

Dream rolled onto his back, glaring up at her at the usage of his surname. She shrugged at him and he rolled his eyes.

"Nothing's wrong."

"Uh huh, and that's why ye've been moping in bed all day."

"I'm not moping."

"Says who?"

"Me!"

"Yeah?" Minx scoffed, "And when have ye ever been right about anything?"

Dream remained silent.

“Uh huh, thought so.”

A moment of silence passed between the two.

“I’m stayin ‘ere until ye talk to me.” Minx said definitively.

“You suck.”

“I’m only lettin ye get away with such a shite insult because yer goin through some emotional turmoil right now.”

“Fuck off.”

“No.”

Merlin knows how long the two sat there quietly. To Dream, it felt like hours passed by the time he gave in, though in reality he knew it couldn’t have been longer than a few minutes.

“I like George.” It was the first time he’d said it aloud, and just the sound of his own voice saying the words was enough to color the tips of his freckled ears pink.

“Yeah, I know,” she said simply. It wasn’t the response Dream wanted.

“No but Minx, I *like* him.” He tried to put emphasis on the word ‘like’, hoping she would understand that his feelings for George constituted a lot more than a school boy crush.

“Yes Dream, I’m aware.”

“No— Minx— I like him.” He took a breath “I like him and I only like him and I think I’ve only ever liked him. No girls, none, I— do you understand what I’m trying to say to you here?”

“Yeah,” she answered, her blue eyes soft with sympathy. “I understand you.”

She held her arms out and Dream scooped into them, gladly accepting the awkwardly positioned hug. He sat himself up properly and wrapped his arms around her while she rubbed his back in comforting circles. He rested his chin on her shoulder.

“This is all your fault you know,” he mumbled. Minx laughed.

“What? That you’re gay? Am I really that ugly?”

“No, it’s your fault for making me aware of the fact that I’m gay. I was perfectly happy being in the dark.”

Minx scoffed and shook her head. Dream leaned back and gave her a sly smile. “You *are* that ugly though. One look at you all gross and sweaty after flying practice yesterday and it literally ruined my day. My attraction to the female gender was gone in a flash.”

Minx pushed him off of her, mock hurt in her eyes.

“Ye cunt!”

“I know, I know, I’m terrible.” He lay back down. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

"I don't know, accepting me? I guess?"

"Why would I not accept you? Dream, I'm literally pansexual."

"Wait, you are?"

"Yes! Now quit gawkin at me like I'm a zoo animal, ye feckin weirdo," she snapped.

"Sorry," Dream apologized with a smile, "you just give off, like...mildly homophobic vibes."

"WHAT?!" Minx shrieked. "Are ye *serious*, Selwyn? How the *fuck* am I homophobic?"

"Maybe it's the bigoted parents."

"Well if that were it, ye'd be even *more* homophobic, Dream-boy."

"That's true," he agreed, his mood sombering again. "I'm sorry."

"What?" said Minx, bemused at his sudden shift in tone. "Yer sorry for thinking I'm homophobic? Ye better be."

"No, never, I still stand by that," Dream winced as Minx punched his arm. "No, I— I guess I'm sorry for liking George."

Minx blinked at him like he'd said something nonsensical. "Dream, I'll be honest, I'm so feckin confused right now. Why in Merlin's name are ye sorry for likin George?"

"Well, uh," Dream stammered, "I mean— isn't it a little weird to have a crush on your ex-best friend who also happens to be your current best friend's ex-boyfriend? That seems like it violates a billion different friend codes."

"Dream—"

"No, Minx, you guys went through a lotta shit and I don't wanna, I don't know, overstep? I just—" Dream floundered, lost for words. "I'm sorry."

Minx scoffed and rolled her eyes. "Yer a real idiot. Yer sweet, but a feckin idiot if I ever saw one." Dream opened his mouth to refute the insult but shut it again when Minx continued, "Dream, ye've been in love with George for a very, very, long time, probably even before you two got to Hogwarts. My third-year relationship — with a boy I no longer have anything *close* to romantic feelings for — means absolutely nothing compared to yer relationship with him."

Again, Dream tried to butt in, only to be cut off.

"I *don't* like George," Minx insisted. "In fact, I'd go as far as to say I strongly dislike him at the moment. I dated him for a bit in our third year, who cares? He means a million times more to you than he does to anybody else, so who the fuck am I to get in the way of that? Frankly, it's none of my business." She reached for Dream's hand on the bedsheets and gave it a quick squeeze.

"And besides," she said, the sweetened sympathy in her eyes quickly being replaced by a familiar, more mischievous expression. "I've already got my eyes on someone else."

Dream sat up at the speed of light, turning to look at her imploringly.

"No fucking way! Who?"

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George collapsed onto his pillows, his limbs feeling heavy and his eyelids drooping.

He'd just gotten home after a long day's work at a neighbour's house and felt so drained that even blinking felt exhausting. The infant he'd babysat for *nine hours straight* had been the splitting image of Tommy, right down to the unnaturally powerful set of lungs. The little boy screamed *and* cried uncontrollably for most of the day, only stopping to vomit on George's new shirt — the shirt that he belatedly realised he was still wearing.

Disgusted by his own blunder, he stood up quickly and peeled the garment from his sweaty upper body, tossing it carelessly into a nearby hamper. After a moment, he also stripped his bed in case any traces of vomit had gotten on his sheets, too.

He groaned and flopped onto his bare mattress, turning onto his side to face his bedroom window. The soft orange glow of the setting sun gently warmed his face as he strained his eyes, hoping for a glimpse of a certain gangly blond boy.

Not hoping, just expecting, George scolded himself. *They were neighbours, after all, it's expected that you would catch a glimpse of your neighbour every once in a while.*

Every day, George looked out that window, waiting for even a flash of that familiar figure, and every day he was disappointed.

No, he admonished himself once again. You're not disappointed. You do not want to see him, remember?

He closed his eyes. He knew he was lying to himself.

The two sides of his brain could bicker all they wanted to, but the first one, the unfiltered one that always seemed to betray his emotions, was always going to be right.

George really wanted to see Dream. He was ashamed of himself for it, but at this point, he couldn't even deny it.

Just thinking of all the time they'd spent together made him hopelessly sad. And thinking of all the time they'd missed made him even sadder.

George liked to think that he was quite convincing when he put on a show of not missing his former best friend. For a while, he had even managed to convince *himself*. He'd had himself convinced that he was better off, *happier* even, without the Slytherin by his side. But moments like these, when he lay alone with only his thoughts for company, caused his facade to crumble and tears to prick his tired eyes.

In truth, he desperately missed Dream.

He'd never tell anyone that, of course.

He was still furious with Dream, still frustrated beyond belief with his inability to see reason. To openly miss Dream would be to forgive him, and George couldn't let anyone think he was willing to forgive bigoted pureblood ideals.

But even so, deep down, hidden in the depths of his heart that nobody could reach, George missed him. Sometimes, George missed Dream so much that he couldn't stand it.

It was even worse today because it was the twelfth of August, Dream's fifteenth birthday. And George had woken up, immediately knowing what day it was and so excited to celebrate it with him. Until he remembered.

Usually, at this time of day, no matter how exhausted he was, George would be excitedly wrapping a carefully-chosen birthday present and preparing to sneak out and surprise the boy in his backyard. This time, however, he'd gotten Dream nothing, not even a card.

Yawning, George stood up and walked over to the window sill, nearly pressing his face against the glass in an effort to see a balloon or streamer or *anything* that would indicate some sort of birthday celebration.

Nothing. There was always nothing.

It was like Dream had ceased to exist.

George hadn't seen any sign of the boy all summer, and he would be lying if he said that fact didn't worry him. But Dream wasn't his to fret over anymore.

With that thought, he trudged downstairs to the kitchen, where he found his mum sitting at the kitchen table, staring intently at her laptop.

"Are you alright, Mum?" he asked her as he poured himself a glass of lemonade. His mother looked up at him in surprise, then waved her hand dismissively.

"Oh, yes, just popping an email off to that other real estate agent your father's friend recommended. Alessandra told us there wasn't a chance of finding a listing within our budget, so I thought it best to seek out a second opinion." She paused and looked back up at George quizzically. "Why aren't you wearing a shirt?"

George glanced down at his bare chest. "Er...the neighbour's kid threw up on my shirt."

"Well, put another one on!"

"*Mum.*" George dragged the word out in the way all teenagers seemed to have mastered.

"Never did I think my son would be one of those shirtless men, parading himself around like he's all that."

"I'm in *our house*, Mum, it's fine."

Mrs. Davidson tutted. George clutched his glass and quickly turned away, not wanting his mum to catch the cheeky smile fall from his face.

His parents started talking about selling their house shortly after his father had lost his job, but they kept putting it off in the hopes that the market would shift and they'd sell their current house for as much as they could. George was secretly happy that his parents were having bad luck — it meant he got to stay in his childhood home, the place where he grew up, just a bit longer.

Every corner of the house was home to some or other memory. He'd learned to walk in this house, talk in this house; this house was where he'd had his first Christmas and Easter and—

—outside this house was where he met Dream.

And therein lay the primary source of George's anguish.

Even if they weren't on speaking terms, it would still feel wrong to look out his window and *not* see the Selwyns' house. George couldn't imagine calling somewhere else home. He'd come to realize that a large part of what made his house feel special was the magical boy who lived next door, and the prospect of leaving that magic behind sounded depressing.

Sometimes it almost felt like Dream was his home.

But if he ever was, that was now gone. Only memories were left to keep George so attached to the street that was so easily bathed in sunlight, the same sunlight that had always shone through Dream's dirty blond hair, making it resemble melted gold.

The sunlight would be different if he moved, and he would never get to see that melted gold again.

George paused on the staircase, one leg still raised mid-step, thinking.

Dream didn't know that George would likely be moving soon. He could imagine the shock on the boy's face when he realized that George and his family had disappeared overnight, leaving an empty house, maybe even a new family, in their place. If things were different and it was *Dream's* family who were moving house, George supposed he'd want to know. Even under the current circumstances.

He sighed before chugging the remainder of his lemonade, resuming his steps. He set the empty glass down on his dresser. Throwing on the first shirt he saw, he ran back down the stairs, slipping a pair of white tennis shoes on on his way out the door.

His mother was too enthralled in her search to notice his departure.

He had to at least tell Dream what was going on. Perhaps he'd even wish the boy a happy birthday just to be polite. George would be courteous.

That's what he told himself, anyway.

For the first time in ages, George walked up to the Selwyns' front door. He took a deep breath to prepare himself for what would likely be an uncomfortable encounter.

He could do this. It was just Dream.

Just Dream.

His Dream.

Before he could raise his fist to knock on the door, however, it burst open. George jumped back, expecting to see one of the Selwyns standing opposite him, but instead his eyes landed on none other than Jebediah Schlatt. Dream's Hogwarts roommate. Schlatt's eyes widened in surprise at the sight of the unexpected visitor.

"George!" he exclaimed. "Wow, uh, hey. Didn't know you were coming by. Uh...can I help you?"

"Why are you in Dream's house?" George blurted out rather impolitely. Schlatt winced in response.

"Oh, uh, well, uh, I was just visiting. Ya know."

“I don’t know.”

Schlatt seemed eager to direct the conversation away from himself. “Listen, if you’re looking for Dreamy, the kid’s not here. He’s in Ireland for the summer.”

“Ireland?” George repeated, confused. “But it’s his birthday.”

“Is it? Damn. Time flies, huh?”

Mildly irritated with Schlatt’s unwillingness to divulge more information, George gritted his teeth and asked another follow-up question. “Why is Dream in Ireland?”

“He’s with Minx.”

George opened his mouth to give a response but suddenly, there was the sound of breaking glass and an indiscernible shout. George recognized the voice as belonging to Dream’s father.

Schlatt stiffened, and before George could let out an angered response to the revelation that Dream was with *Minx*, Schlatt was dragging him off the front step and behind the flutterby bushes that were planted by the side of the house.

“Schlatt?! What on earth are you—?”

But the rest of his shout was cut short by Schlatt’s hand settling firmly over his mouth. George was now flushed with confusion and anger. He shook Schlatt off indignantly and shot him a look that demanded an explanation.

Schlatt placed a finger to his own lips and gestured towards the house, inside of which loud yelling could still be heard.

“When will he be back?” George whispered.

Schlatt shrugged. “I don’t know. He’s probably not coming back here anytime soon, though. He’s been there the whole summer.”

“He’s been with Minx the whole sum—”

But another crash sounded from inside the Selwyn house, cutting George off. Schlatt winced at the sound.

“Look, I gotta get going. It was good seeing ya, George. You want me to let Dream know you stopped by?”

“Don’t bother,” George grumbled. Schlatt gave him a half smile and a wave before he turned to go back into the house. George watched as the other boy jogged back towards the front door and let himself inside like he lived there.

Like he lived there...

George trudged his way home, dragging his feet and his head hung low. Begrudgingly, he was disappointed that he couldn’t talk to Dream, or even see him, and he was more disappointed that he probably wouldn’t see him for the rest of the summer.

He sighed as he pushed open his own front door, passing his mother silently as he moved up the stairs and towards his bedroom.

George found himself incredibly confused after his confrontation with Schlatt, sighing heavily as he fell into his pillows for the second time that day.

He stared at the Selwyns' house again, trying to see through the magical walls and figure out what was going on inside. Why was Schlatt there, especially when Dream wasn't even there for him to visit? Why did Schlatt behave like he lived in the house, even though George had never seen him there before?

And finally, why did Dream have to be in Ireland with Minx? George knew they were friends, he'd seen them together at Hogwarts, but it still rubbed him the wrong way. The thought of Dream spending time with her made George's blood boil. His insides squirmed at the mere idea of it.

He didn't like that Dream had a new best friend, but if he *was* going to have a new best friend, why did it have to be *Minx*?

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Dream woke up to a thick parcel being dropped on his chest and a familiar voice loudly calling his name.

"OI, SELWYN! GIT YER ARSE OUTTA BED!"

He opened his eyes to the sight of a very impatient looking Minx at his bedside. Groaning, he reached for the blanket and pulled it over his head, obscuring himself from her view.

"What do you want," he grumbled. In response, Minx yanked the blanket back down and pointed emphatically at the parcel.

"Open it, ye dimwit!"

"What? Huh?" he croaked, glancing down at the envelope. Begrudgingly, he picked it up and tore it open to reveal a long piece of parchment stamped with the famous Hogwarts seal. "Oh, it's just school supplies lists."

"EXACTLY!" Minx shouted. She proceeded to unwrap her own letter, which she shoved in Dream's face. "I have to buy meself a crystal ball for Divination this year. HA! That class is such a feckin' joke."

And without warning, Minx reached over and grabbed Dream's envelope. She then turned it upside down and shook it fervently while Dream watched, thoroughly bemused. Upon ascertaining that the envelope was indeed empty, she scoffed and threw it back on the bed.

"Looks like yer not a prefect either," she stated.

Dream raised an eyebrow. "Did you really think I would be?"

"No. Oi' Minnie hates our guts. Even if we were the top students in the entire school she'd make the Whomping Willow prefect before she chose either one of us."

"Who do you think got it then?"

"I bet ten galleons it's that one bitch that I dorm with, sumthin Davis or whatever. I swear someone

shoved a wand so far up her arse it knocked her brains out through er nose.”

Minx’s face was contorted in disgust, and Dream chuckled in appreciation of her. There was just something about her that made her impossible not to like after a while.

Dream stretched and sat up. “Weren’t the school supply lists supposed to come earlier? We only have, like, a week left until the start of the semester.”

“Yea, well McGonagal probably had a right time trying to find prefects, seeing as everyone in our year is abysmal at magic,” Minx grunted. Dream didn’t know how much he agreed with her on that, but his head was hurting from all the yelling, and seeing as the day had just begun, he didn’t want to create another excuse for her to continue.

“I guess we gotta go to Diagon Alley, get our stuff,” he said, and Minx seemed to perk up at the thought.

“Yeah!” she said, eyes shimmering in the light of a new idea, “And we can owl Puffy and Niki to see if we can all meet up.”

“Don’t be so excited to get rid of me,” he teased, but he liked the idea of seeing the girls again. He’d missed them.

“Oh shut up, ye cow,” she said, shoving his head sideways. “I’m just excited to not be alone with yer smelly emo arse.”

“Ouch.” Dream deadpanned. She stuck her tongue out at him.

“Ye got a lot to update them on, too,” said Minx, quirking an eyebrow.

“Huh? Like wha-” he caught her gaze and immediately understood what she meant. “Oh.”

“Yeah,” she said, exasperated.

“Well...you *did* say everyone already knows,” Dream tried to reason, “so what’s the point in telling them?”

“Because they’re yer *friends*. An’ they’re understanding.” She paused to wink at him. “And if ye decide to tell em, ye get three wing women!”

“*Wing women*? Minx, me and George literally don’t even talk anymore. I don’t need wing women.”

“We’ll see,” she replied, still smiling, “I got a funny feelin about this year.”

After breakfast, the two of them rushed to find Minx’s owl and send letters to Niki and Puffy. To their delight, both girls wrote back within a day, each saying they would be free the Thursday before school started. A few more correspondences later, they had plans to meet up, and Dream could not be more excited.

Underneath that excitement, though, was a current of nervous energy.

He knew he was most likely going to see George at Diagon Alley. There was only one place to shop for school supplies, and with how late the lists had come out, the odds were that Dream would bump into him at some point on Thursday. And that presented a problem, because it would be his first time seeing George since The Realisation. All the healing Dream had done over the summer

felt like it could shatter like the world's thinnest sheet glass in a second if he laid eyes on George again.

He understood the nature of their relationship better now: even though George hated Dream, Dream could never *not* love George. Not loving George just wasn't possible for him.

He woke up early Thursday morning with a jolt. His dream had been unsettling, but he couldn't quite recall why. He stared up at his ceiling until Minx knocked on his door and yelled at him to get dressed, at which point he threw on the first acceptable set of robes he could find.

When they arrived at Diagon Alley, they found the area unsurprisingly packed full of people. Crowds of people congregated around the entrances to various shops, making it difficult to navigate the alley as a group. There was a particularly dense mob around Flourish and Blotts, so the two Slytherins decided to take an arbitrary trip to Quality Quidditch supplies to admire the top-range broomsticks in the hopes that the crowds would die down after a while.

As they approached the storefront, however, the sight of the shop made them stop in their tracks.

Plastered on almost every surface were giant posters spouting WAP propaganda messages. The windows were so covered in images of dejected-looking children and blood vials and magic wands that one could barely see the broomsticks that were on display. Above it all in bright red lettering were the words *DONATE BLOOD TODAY*.

Minx frowned. "They're gettin' more an' more bold. I must've seen twenty posters since we've been 'ere."

Dream hummed in agreement, his breath hitching at the sight of a poster featuring a man who bore an eerie resemblance to his father, pictured right next to a little blond girl.

"Why in the name of Merlin do they need so much blood anyway?" Minx huffed. "Almost every witch or wizard in the entire country has already given them blood for their stupid feckin' experiments. The posters are just overkill at this point."

Suddenly feeling as though he was going to be sick, Dream grabbed her arm and pulled her abruptly away from the shop window. He led them blindly down the cobblestone streets, keeping his eyes down so as to avoid glimpsing any more WAP posters.

Minx remained silent as she followed his lead, and Dream once again felt grateful for her presence. She understood.

Unknowingly, he'd led them to the late Florean Fortescue's ice cream parlour, which was now run by his daughter. Thankfully, Flavia Fortescue had refused the WAP's bribes, so there were no magical posters plastered to her shop window.

"Hmm, ice cream? Dream, are ye hungry or somethin'?" Minx teased. Dream glared at her half-heartedly.

"Shut up," he muttered.

"Well then, come on," she said, pulling the door open and causing the bell at the top of the entrance to tinkle welcomingly. "It'll distract you."

The pair ordered their favourite ice cream flavours in giant waffle cones. Once they'd acquired their frozen treats, they continued their previous trek down Diagon Alley.

Minx had decided it would be best for them to get their school shopping out of the way first so that they could do more or less whatever they wanted when they met up with Niki and Puffy. She dragged them into store after store, pushing through the crowds and telling Dream off whenever he grabbed the wrong item under her command.

It was a very exhausting yet very efficient 45 minutes. Dream barely even had time to finish his magical mint chip ice cream cone.

Their last stop was Ollivanders. Minx claimed she needed some wand polish, but when they arrived Dream understood the real reason they were there.

The shop fragrance hit them as soon as they walked in. Dust-coated boxes lined each wall, giving the store its familiar cluttered yet cozy appearance. The delicate hum of levitating gas lamps made for soothing, nostalgic background noise, putting patrons at ease and casting the interior in a warm glow. Ordinarily, Dream would take a moment to peruse the store's shelves, but the sight of a hunched figure standing several feet away gave him pause.

The figure glanced up at them and smiled, which was when Dream realized he was looking at a very dishevelled Jebediah Schlatt.

"What? You two following me now or something?" Schlatt said, his voice raspy. As Dream stepped closer, he noticed that his friend's skin looked sallow and his lips were dry and cracking.

Minx smiled back. "Maybe don't make it so easy next time, eh?" she replied smugly.

Schlatt laughed quietly and pulled Minx into a swift hug, pulling away before speaking to Dream.

"Wassup, Dream-boat?"

"Not much," Dream answered with a shrug. "How's Drista?"

Schlatt's smile softened. "She's doin' alright. She misses you a bunch. Talks about you everyday."

Dream's heart seemed to swell. "I bet my father doesn't like that," he responded with a dry laugh.

"No..." Schlatt answered. "I can't say the old man loves it."

Dream hummed and turned to look at Minx only to discover that she was no longer beside him. The girl had moved to examine the varieties of wand polish that were on display.

Schlatt cleared his throat. "She's not the only one who missed you, though."

Dream pursed his lips in confusion. "Hm?"

"Your little boyfriend stopped by for a visit."

At that, Dream's heart skipped a beat before it began to pound intensely in his chest. Did Schlatt mean...?

"George stopped by?"

Schlatt nodded. "Yeah, he was looking for you."

Suddenly, the noises around Dream faded into background noise. The voices in his head delighted in this new revelation.

*George, George, George.*

*George* was at his house.

*George* was looking for him.

*George*—

“Yo— you good, buddy?” Schlatt asked, a concerned frown turning the corners of his lips downwards.

Dream shook his head to clear it and refocused his eyes on Schlatt.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m good. Ummm, did George say anything when he came by?”

“Hmm... Well, the day he visited I think it was your birthday. So I guess that's why he was there, but when I told him you were in Ireland he got all pissy and left.”

Dream was reeling from this information.

George had visited *his* house on *his* birthday. George *wanted* to see Dream, and Dream hadn’t been there.

“So he didn’t say why he was there?”

“Nope,” Said Schlatt, much to Dream’s displeasure. “I asked him if he wanted me to let you know that he stopped by, but he said no.”

Dream said nothing, his mind and heart still racing.

“You good, buddy?” Schlatt asked again. “I know there’s been somethin’ going on between you two, but—”

“Let him alone, Schlatty.” Minx appeared behind Schlatt and wrapped a lazy arm around his shoulders, a stained glass bottle of wand polish in her hand. “He gets in a right state whenever Gogs is on the brain.”

“Oh, come on, Minx—”

“Excuse me!” Dream was cut off by a wizened old man who had appeared out of nowhere. He looked as though he was brought into existence by the dust that surrounded his musty shop; in other words, he looked old as shit.

The old man — Ollivander, Dream realised — held out a wand to Schlatt and smiled. “The wand itself was fine. Your thestral hair core was fraying; all it needed was a bit of care. It should be good as new.”

Schlatt took the wand gratefully and slid a few coins across the counter. “Thanks a million, Sir.”

Once Schlatt and Minx had paid for their purchases, the three Slytherins made their way outside. Minx and Schlatt quickly launched into some discussion of their upcoming year in Divination class, a conversation that Dream tuned out for the most part. He continued to mindlessly follow his friends around Diagon Alley, occasionally humming in agreement when directly spoken to, until his ears registered the faint sound of someone singing in the distance.

As they rounded the corner, the voice grew clearer and Dream’s suspicions were confirmed.

“Oi,” Minx said, interrupting Schlatt mid-sentence, “is that Wilbur feckin’ Soot?”

The house-mates paused to listen closer. Though it was hard to distinguish at first amongst the hustle and bustle of the crowd, the voice singing faintly in the distance was unmistakable.

*“One day, I know that you will be there*

*One day, I’ll focus on our future, Sally,*

*One day, oh, baby, why is life so fucking inconsistent?”*

Dream suppressed a smile at the lyrics. Of course Wilbur was still pining over Sally.

The amusement he felt at hearing the tune was abruptly replaced with terror, however, the moment he heard a second voice above the crowd.

“—wow Wilbur,” said the one person Dream was both terrified of and desperate to see, “Sally really has a hold on you, doesn’t she? Is she still babysitting Tommy?”

*George.*

Dream’s whole body went rigid. They — George and Wilbur and whoever else — were getting closer by the second. They were about to round the corner and come face to face with Dream, and Dream didn’t know what to do.

His first instinct was to drop his shopping bags, run back into Ollivanders, and take cover behind a stack of dusty old boxes, but he’d never live that down. Just as he was about to ask Minx if they could duck into the nearby pharmacy, however, the group was upon them.

“Shut up, Gogi,” Wilbur shot back. “We both know full well I’m not the only simp among us!”

“What’s that even supposed to mean?”

No one heard the end of that sentence. It was at that very moment that the entirety of Dream’s old friend group rounded the corner, every single one of his former friends looking taller, happier, and in better shape than he remembered.

*Maybe they won’t notice us. Maybe they’ll just keep walking.*

As if to prove him wrong, George chose that second to turn his head and lock eyes with him.

*Merlin, George is breathtaking.*

Once their eyes met, it was impossible for Dream to tear his away. He knew it couldn’t have been three months since they last saw each other, but George looked so...different. He was taller — though still *much* shorter than Dream — and his lush brown hair looked fluffier and a shade or two lighter from the summer sun. He was dressed in Muggle clothing, Dream noted, and his light blue t-shirt showed off lean, ever-so-slightly defined arms, probably from a summer full of laborious muggle jobs.

Simply put, George looked beautiful, hot, even.

Dream would have continued his ogling if it weren’t for Niki barreling into his chest. The Hufflepuff squealed excitedly before pulling back to look Dream in the eyes.

“Dream!” she exclaimed, grinning. “I missed you! It’s been so long!”



“Hi, Niki,” he replied. He tried to smile back at her, though it was strained. “It’s so good to see you.”

Dream cast a quick glance over at the group with whom she had arrived. All of them were standing awkwardly a few feet away. Wilbur and Technoblade were trying to make small talk, but Eret and George couldn’t seem to play along and simply stared at their own feet. It was weird how they all looked so different — Wilbur was at least half a foot taller than he had been at the end of the last school year, Techno had longer hair and new frames for his glasses, and Eret had a growth spurt of their own. Dream had been so captivated by George at first that he’d neglected to even look at other friends.

Well, his *former* friends.

As if he could feel Dream’s lingering gaze on the group over Niki’s head, George looked up and met his eyes once more.

“—and then we went to Sugarplum’s Sweet Shop for some cauldron cakes, and then we came here, and then we saw you! And now—wait, Dream, are you even listening? Hello? Dreammm? Helloooo?”

Dream and George looked away at the same moment, identical blushes painting their cheeks. Dream looked down sheepishly at Niki and smiled apologetically.

“Sorry, Niki, what did you say?”

Niki rolled her eyes. “I was *trying* to tell you about our day so far, but you clearly have other things on your mind.” Dream hit her lightly on the arm.

“Enough talking to this twat,” Minx cut in. She looked at Niki fondly and held out her arms. “Where’s *my* hug?”

Niki didn’t need any more prompting. She threw herself happily into Minx’s arms, giggling as the Slytherin girl picked her up and spun her around in circles before setting her back down.

Schlatt coughed. “Uh, sorry to interrupt the happy reunion, guys, but I prolly should get goin’,” he said awkwardly. “I gotta go find Eric...I ran away from him earlier ‘cuz he wouldn’t shut the fuck up about his goddamned prefect badge, but I can’t leave the guy alone for too much longer.”

“MCGONAGALL MADE *THAT* CUNT FUCK IDIOT PREFECT?” Minx shrieked. Her voice was so piercing that everyone in her vicinity winced. Wilbor looked particularly uncomfortable.

Schlatt smirked. “Fuck yeah she did! And you’re gonna love this, Minxy my dear— she made your roommate Davis one, too!”

“I fuckin KNEW IT!” Minx threw her hands up in the air. “That fuckin *bitch*! What’d I tell ye, Dream? I *told* you she’d make a pile of dragon dung prefect before either one of us!”

Niki placed a hand on Minx’s shoulder, looking confused. “But Minx,” she implored, “you told me so many times that if you became a prefect you’d leave the school.”

“No, Ye don’t *understand* Niki,” Minx explained in a tone implying that what she was saying was the most obvious thing in the world, “it’s the *PRINCIPLE* of it all.”

Niki turned to Dream with a raised eyebrow. He shrugged in response.

Schlatt soon departed, prompting Niki to bid a quick goodbye to Wilbur and the rest of the other group. Dream nodded awkwardly in lieu of a farewell, but his former friends were already walking away. Niki quickly grabbed Minx's hand and led them to Eeylop's Owl Emporium where they were to meet Puffy.

The stench of bird droppings assaulted their senses as soon as they entered the owl shop. Niki immediately spotted Puffy in a corner petting a newly-hatched owl chick. Dream's three female friends were soon enveloping each other in one big loud hug pile, attracting odd looks from the shop's patrons.

"Hey, Dream, get your butt over here!" Puffy called out, wrestling an arm free to beckon him over. Reluctantly, he trudged up to the girls and allowed himself to be wrapped up into the group hug, eventually placing his own arms around the girls' as well.

After what had to be at least a full minute of prolonged hugging, Dream pulled away and wrinkled his nose. "Can we please take this outside? It stinks here."

Puffy nodded sheepishly. "Yeah, maybe this wasn't the best place for our reunion. I just like seeing all the baby owls. We can head out, though."

The four friends exited the owlery and stood in a circle outside on the cobblestone street.

"What do we want to do now?" Niki asked. "It was Dream's birthday not long ago, no? Should we celebrate?"

Dream immediately began to protest. "What? No, guys, you already sent me presents in the mail. That was *more* than enough celebration. Thank you, by the way," he nodded at Niki and Puffy.

"Let's just take a walk," Puffy suggested. "We can brainstorm as we go."

The group walked aimlessly up and down the alley's winding streets, catching up and cracking jokes. Eventually, they walked all the way over to the large brick wall that marked the exit into the Leaky Cauldron, and then out to Muggle London.

"You guys wanna get dinner at the Leaky Cauldron?" Dream asked the group.

Puffy snorted. "You wanna celebrate your birthday at the Leaky Cauldron?"

"What? No, guys, I told you, we're not celebrating my birthday. I just suggested we get a non-occasion-specific dinner," he answered.

"That's no fun!" Niki pouted. "We want to celebrate!"

"But—"

"Ohhh my god, Dream," Minx groaned, punching him in the arm, "We want to celebrate yer birthday with you because we are your *friends*. Get it through yer thick skull!"

"Woah," Dream said in mock surprise, "did you just admit to being my friend?"

"Don't get used to it, fucker."

Dream sighed. "Alright, fine. We can get dinner and say it's for my birthday."

"Alright!" Puffy punched the air victoriously. "Birthday dinner at the Leaky Cauldron!"

“But no singing! *Please.* ”

“Ha! That wasn’t part of the deal!”

Niki and Puffy raced each other to the Leaky Cauldron while Dream and Minx lagged behind. Dream was still shaking his head at his friends’ antics.

“They’re gonna sing. Be prepared,” Minx warned.

Dream groaned.

When they caught up to the younger girls inside the pub, it was immediately clear that they were displeased.

“This place sucks,” Puffy stated. Beside her, Niki nodded in agreement.

“The atmosphere is not good for a birthday celebration,” the German girl added.

Dream glanced around the dark tavern and ran a hand through his hair. “Yeah,” he agreed, “this place is awful. But where else is there to celebrate?”

There was a minute of silence as they all tried to think of a different place to eat. Finally, Minx gasped and looked at Dream with a twinkle in her icy blue eyes.

“What if we went into Muggle London?” she proposed.

Dream looked at her quizzically. “Muggle London?”

“Yeah, why not? There’s gotta be plenty o’ places we could eat. We could do some fun Muggle things for yer birthday.”

“Minx...” Puffy began, “Don’t you need Muggle money to buy food from Muggle restaurants?”

“Oh, shite, yer feckin right.”

“I have muggle money!” Niki spoke up. When the three of others looked at her in surprise, she added, “Wilbur needed Muggle money for something, so we went to Gringotts and converted several galleons. I thought it might be useful, so I bought some, too!”

“Well, aren’t you brilliant?” Minx said affectionately, clapping her hands together. “Niki’s saved us all! If that’s all settled, shall we go?”

Dream placed the knowledge that you could convert galleons into muggle bills in the back of his mind.

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Muggle London turned out to be much more exciting than Dream had expected. The four friends wandered the streets, feeling out of place in their wizarding robes but nonetheless fascinated by all of the cool buildings. Dream wasn’t as surprised by the non-magical part of town as the others — he had grown up in a Muggle neighbourhood, after all — but he was still captivated by the many Muggles passing by in their Muggle clothing.

After taking several random turns down unfamiliar blocks, the gang decided to go into a flower shop. The shop owner only spared them a glance when they walked in, too busy assembling a bouquet at the counter to pay much attention to the oddly-clothed group of teenagers.

The Muggle flower shop was nothing like the greenhouses at Hogwarts. The magical children were unprepared for the vast walls of floral beauty displayed all around the store. Baskets and shelves stacked with dried flower arrangements lined the room's perimeter. There were wreaths and vases for sale in the back. The storefront also heavily featured several tiny, individually potted plants with thick, fleshy leaves; a nearby sign declared these "succulents," and Puffy took an immediate liking to them.

"These plants don't *move!*" Puffy exclaimed, reaching out to touch one of the miniature prickly plants on display.

"Please do not handle our merchandise unless you intend to purchase them!" the shopkeeper called out from her counter.

"Sorry!"

Niki sighed wistfully. "Are all Muggle herbs this wonderful?" she asked Dream.

"Uh...I don't know," he responded, shrugging, "a lot of these herbs are almost exactly like wizarding herbs."

Suddenly, Niki reached up and snatched a pot from a top shelf, holding it up to light streaming in through the shop's windows. The label on the front of the plant read "bonsai."

"Hey, Minx?" she called out to the Slytherin, "Doesn't this look like a Wiggentree to you?"

Minx paused her admiration of some purple alliums to glance at the tree in Niki's pot. "D'ye *really* think a Muggle shop would have a *Wiggentree* lyin' about, Niki?"

"Shh, Minx, you're too loud!" Puffy whispered through giggles, looking pointedly at the shopkeeper.

Minx tilted her head towards the miniature tree and squinted her eyes. "On second thought, it *is* glowin' a teensy bit, innit? Selwyn, look at this!"

The shopkeeper was starting to look genuinely annoyed. From the corner of his eye, Dream saw her put down her bouquet and start to approach their group.

"Uh, guys, I think we should get going. Just pay for your stuff and let's head out," he urged his friends. Niki and Puffy ended up buying what must have been a dozen succulents between the two of them.

"I love muggle London!" Niki said happily once they'd left the premises. Everyone else hummed in agreement.

Dream's stomach growled as they passed a street vendor selling delicious-smelling fried treats, reminding him that he'd eaten nothing but an ice cream cone for lunch. Puffy laughed at him and bumped his shoulder.

"D'you wanna get dinner now?" she teased.

"Ugh, *yes*," Dream groaned, "I'm literally starving."

Niki pointed to a small, casual-looking 1960's themed restaurant that looked somewhat antiquated. "You guys wanna go there?"

"Sure, I'm up for that," Puffy replied. "Let's eat!"

Puffy marched right up to the hostess and requested a table for four. After a moment's discussion of their seating preferences, the woman led them to a cosy booth in the corner, her high heels clacking rhythmically on the tiled floor as she walked away.

They all ordered coffee with their food to keep themselves awake. They didn't know how long they'd be out, but they wanted to be energised and ready for several more hours of adventure. When their food arrived, they wolfed it all up eagerly. In between bites, Dream glanced out the window and noticed a peculiar glowing sign displaying the word *CINEWORLD* in capital letters.

"Guys! What the hell do you think that place is?" he asked, pointing to the building.

"Woah!" gasped Puffy. "I don't know, but it looks so cool!"

"Looks feckin' grand," Minx agreed. "Puffy, call the waitress over so we can get out of 'ere!"

They hurriedly paid for their meals and were soon out the restaurant's glass doors and across the street. All four of them stood before the building and its neon lights, wondering what could be inside.

"Hey," Minx said, turning to Niki, "Go in there and sound German and ask what this place is."

"What?" Niki replied, perplexed. "I *am* German."

"Yeah, but ye basically sound english at the point. Go in there and exaggerate the German."

"Why does she need to sound German?" Puffy asked. Minx rolled her eyes.

"Because," she said, "don't ye think muggles already know what this place is? If Niki sounds foreign, maybe the guys in there won't think we're idiots."

Dream nodded appreciatively. "She's right. We'll go in with you and you can do the talking, yeah?"

"You guys are so weird," Puffy huffed.

When they entered the building, they saw a lot of flashing lights and enormous posters plastering the walls. Only they couldn't be posters, Dream realised, because Muggle posters didn't move, but these *did*.

Dream gasped and turned abruptly to his friends. "Guys! I know what this is!"

"What is it?" Puffy asked.

"We're in a movie theatre!"

Niki's eyes lit up. "A cinema?"

"Yes! These moving pictures are like the ones Geo—uh, Muggles have playing in their living rooms on TVs! But movie theatres have even bigger screens," Dream explained.

"This is the place where Techno an' Schlatt see their movies!" Minx realised.

“Well, probably not this exact place, but yeah,” Dream nodded.

Puffy pointed to the ticket counter. “What are we waiting for, then? Let’s go in!”

They walked up to the counter and asked the woman which film she thought they should see. The kind ticket seller recommended a movie called *The Fault in our Stars* which started in five minutes. They eagerly handed over the money — they didn’t quite care *which* movie they saw, it was the experience they were after — and sprinted up the staircase that led to Theater Three.

Minx and Puffy stopped on the way to their seats in order to buy snacks and drinks. When they returned, the group found their seats in the dimly-lit theater and settled in with giant buckets of popcorn.

“Is this the movie?” Puffy whispered.

“I don’t think so,” said Dream. “I think these are just advertisements for other movies.”

“Shh!”

“It’s not even the movie, Niki.”

“I don’t care! Shh!”

By the time the actual movie came on, the four friends were practically quivering with anticipation.

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About two hours later, the anticipation had long dissolved into tears.

“OH MY GOD!” Minx sobbed, snot running down her face. She wasn’t the only one crying — every single one of them was bawling.

“I KNOW!” Puffy cried, “WHY THE FUCK DID HE HAVE TO DIE?!”

“That w-was bullshit,” Dream sniffed. “He shouldn’t— he was so young— why did— wha—” he couldn’t even get the words out without choking on his own tears.

He turned to Niki to say something to her, but she didn’t even look mentally present. The German girl was curled up in her chair and staring intently at the screen as if the characters would reappear any second.

“WHAT THE FUCK EVEN *IS* CANCER?!” Minx wailed. “WH-WHY COULDN’T HE J-JUST DRINK A FECKIN’ POTION AND B-BE BETTER?!”

“I can’t believe it,” Niki said softly, finally coming back to the present. “I can’t believe that Muggles can just...get cancer and then die. That doesn’t seem right.”

“WAIT,” Minx sobbed, chest heaving, “IS CANCER *REAL*? THEY DIDN’T JUST MAKE IT UP FOR THE MOVIE?! FOR MERLIN’S SAKE, I CAN’T PROCESS THIS RIGHT NOW.”

“Me neither,” Puffy sniffled. “Can we go now? Let’s just talk about something fun for a while.”

Minx's sniffing abruptly stopped and she reeled on Dream. "Selwyn has something fun he can tell us!"

The other two girls looked up at him, desperate for a distraction from their movie-induced grief. Dream began to back away slowly, knowing immediately what Minx expected him to divulge.

"No, no, I don't have anything to tell anyone," he tried, but the girls were already on him.

"You can tell us anything, Dream!" Niki insisted as they walked out of the theater. "We love you!"

"Yeah, dude," Puffy added. "What's the fun thing you have to talk about?"

Minx smiled deviously. "You might as well tell them, Selwyn. We could use some good news after what we just watched."

The four friends stopped on a street corner. Dream took a deep breath while the three girls looked up at him expectantly.

"Fine. I guess...I realized something over the summer." He paused, and the girls waited patiently while he gathered the courage to continue.

"I...um... *Ihaveacrushongeorge*," he said in one rushed exhale.

The girls looked confused. "What?" Puffy prodded.

He sighed and closed his eyes, bracing himself.

"I like George."

## Chapter End Notes

According to AO3 statistics, too many people who read this fic do not comment. If you enjoyed this update and want more updates, please comment. It lets us know we're doing a good job.

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# Chapter Twenty-Eight || Year Five

Chapter by [KangarooKen](#), [Serotonin103](#)

## Chapter Summary

Year Five begins.

## Chapter Notes

Hello again!

It's been a while, but we're back. Life gets busy. This chapter and all subsequent chapters are dedicated to Technoblade, the funniest Minecraft player we've ever had the pleasure of watching. We'll miss him dearly, but Technoblade never truly dies. I hope that this story can play a tiny part in keeping his legacy alive and brings at least some comfort to his fans. This may be a DNF fic, but let's be real here, Techno's the main character :))))

Enjoy! Grass is back, and they worked very very hard to get this chapter out! Next one coming sooner rather than later (fingers crossed!)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The train ride to Hogwarts always had a way of putting George's mind at ease. The magical school was his second home, after all — Hogwarts was the only place on earth where he truly felt like he could be free.

He and his friends had planned on arriving early at Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  to avoid the rush for the train and to secure their usual compartment. But with all the traffic and his need to use public transport, George still ended up needing to search for his roommates through a dense crowd. Honestly, one would think it would've gotten a bit easier to find those guys by now, what with their inability to stop growing.

"What do you mean you got a prefect badge?! *I* got a prefect badge!" Wilbur cried incredulously at Techno as George sidled up beside him.

"Oh, congrats, Wil, that's...nice," George commented, unsure how else to insert himself into the conversation.

"Yes, Gogi, it *would* be nice. It would be *very* nice if only there wasn't some kind of obvious mistake here!" he exclaimed, waving his arms wildly at Technoblade, who stood right across from him.

George's eyes followed the movement before settling on the shiny prefect badge fastened to the pink-haired boy's robes.



Oh. That *was* strange.

"I dunno what to tell ya, man," Techno drawled. "I got it in the mail with my list."

"Then why didn't you tell us about it when we were in Diagon Alley?!"

Techno raised an eyebrow. "Why didn't *you* tell us when we were in Diagon Alley?"

Wilbur stammered at that, crossing his arms. "Be-because... I didn't want *you lot* to be jealous!"

Eret snickered. "Come on, Wilbur. When have any of us given you even the smallest impression that we'd be interested in being prefects?"

"I've personally denounced the system a couple'a times," Techno added emphatically.

"You 'personally denounced the system' twice a day," George snorted.

"Yeah, and two's a couple."

"Well, *still!*" Wilbur insisted, "Just 'cause you didn't talk about it, doesn't mean you were vehemently opposed to being prefects!"

"I think I know what's goin' on," Techno interrupted. "You were so busy writin' songs about Sally that you didn't open your Hogwarts letter until after we all met up."

The friends all turned to see Wilbur's response. Faced with the accusation, Wilbur's face took on a distinctly red hue.

"...Maybe."

"Knew it," Techno stated.

"That doesn't explain why *you* didn't tell us, though!"

"Oh, well, it's actually really simple," Techno shrugged simply. "Y'see, I don't care."

"You don't care?" Wilbur echoed.

"Yer hearin skills are incredible, honestly."

He began making his way towards the cart and the rest of the group followed suit.

"That— that's such a shite reason!" Wilbur spluttered, trailing behind them.

"Well, it's my reason." Techno said, "N' in my humble, correct opinion, it's a much better reason than not tellin' my friends because I was too busy writin' songs about girls that don't know I exist."

"SALLY KNOWS I EXIST!"

"Whatever y'say, Willy ."

George cringed. "Does she really still call you that?"

"W-well—"

"Yup." Techno answered in his stead.

"It's a loving pet name!"

"A 'loving pet name' that's literally synonymous with 'penis'— d'you guys think there're any reality-check charms around we could use on this poor guy?"

"I think we're past charms, Techno," Eret said solemnly, a small smirk making its way onto their face. "Though I don't mind the songs that come out of Wilbur's lovesick head; they're quite good."

"I like them, too," George supplied. It was true. Wilbur's musical skills were incredible regardless of the song's subject.

Wil lit up at the compliments so much that he forgot to shoot back against Techno's teasing. "Well, if *that's* the case you'll be delighted to know I've got a new song to perform for you boys today!" he declared, slinging his arms over George and Eret's shoulders.

"And I've got a new pair of earplugs to test, so it's lookin' like wins all around," Techno said, expertly avoiding Wilbur's indignant kick as they all settled into their usual compartment.

As soon as everyone's bags were tucked away, Wilbur immediately pulled out his guitar and began strumming some experimental chords, humming under his breath as he did so.

"What are you doing now?" Eret asked.

"Tuning it," Wilbur replied.

Eret raised their eyebrows. "I thought you could only tune a piano?"

"Heh?" Techno blurted out.

"Why would you think that you can only tune pianos?" George asked.

"My cousin's partner was telling me some muggle joke and one of the punch lines was something like 'you can tune a piano, but you can't tune a fish.' So I thought, 'wow, I guess muggles can only tune pianos, then.' I didn't know you could tune guitars, too. And if you can tune a guitar, what's stopping someone from tuning a fish, anyway?"

"Did they explain what *tunin' means*?" Techno asked, trying and failing to not look too exasperated at his roommates limited muggle vocabulary.

"I know what tuning *means*," Eret scoffed. "It's like what they do to the frogs in the frog choir, yeah? So the music will sound right. I guess muggles *would* have to tune non-magical instruments, but then why wouldn't they be able to tune a fish?"

"Because fish aren't instruments?" George offered.

"Well, why not?" Eret shrugged. "If frogs can be instruments, why can't fish? I'm sure they could make lovely music if you tuned them."

"Because—" Techno cut himself off, struggling to formulate a response.

"That's a rather good point," Wilbur remarked, "We really should try tuning more animals. I reckon after fish we can go for—"

"DREAM!" A piercing shriek sounded from somewhere down the train, interrupting the conversation and turning everyone's head towards the door. It didn't take a Ravenclaw to recognize who the source of all the ruckus was. "THIS IS ALL YER FUCKIN FAULT! IF YER LAZY ASS

HADN'T SLEPT IN WE WOULDN'T 'AVE BEEN FECKIN LATE!"

"Oh come on, Minx!" Dream yelled back, and George felt a pang in his chest when he realized how much his former friend's voice had changed since they'd last spoken. The feelings George had been trying to suppress all summer started creeping back up, and it took a tremendous amount of will power to shove them back down again. "The train's still here, isn't it? It's not like we missed it!"

"YOU DUMB FUCKIN CUNT! THERE'RE NO EMPTY COMPARTMENTS LEFT! WE'LL 'AVE TE SIT WITH SOME DUMB FUCKIN FIRST YEARS NOW!" The shouts were moving down the train, towards the Ravenclaws' compartment. As the owners of the voices drew nearer, the train whistle blew and the Hogwarts Express began to rumble, signaling the start of their journey back to school.

George watched them pass by his compartment through the door's window. First Minx, then Puffy, Niki, and then finally Dream. From the corner of his eye, George could see the boy's silhouette stiffen slightly as he passed before stopping just out of his sight.

"See?" George heard Dream proclaim in a defiantly gleeful tone of voice, "and you said there weren't any empty compartments left!"

"Yeah, yeah," Minx scoffed. "Just shut yer mouth an' get in."

There was the sound of a compartment door sliding shut and the muffled thumps of bodies taking their seats. It was George's turn to stiffen when he felt a heavy body take a seat on the other side of the very wall that his own back was leaning against.

*Please do not be Dream. Please do not be Dream. Please do not be—*

"Did anyone bring Exploding Snap or something? I'm bored already."

*Dream.* When the muffled voice came through the shared compartment wall, his suspicions were confirmed.

After Minx's screaming had subsided, the rest of his compartment went back to their previous conversation, but George couldn't help trying to eavesdrop on what was happening in the compartment next door.

Of course Dream was sitting in a compartment with Minx. He'd spent all summer with the girl's family in Ireland, and from what George saw of the two in Diagon Alley when they were shopping for school supplies, they seemed *very* close. They exhibited the kind of carefree camaraderie that Minx had so clearly desired from George when they were dating.

That last thought gave him pause. Surely Dream and Minx weren't... *dating*. Dream might be naive and spineless at times, but surely he would *never* stoop so low as to date George's racist, bitchy ex.

...Right?

But it all made so much sense, George realized. Dream's summer-long disappearance was so easily explained by the boy having been invited to his girlfriend's manor. And, now that George thought about it, why *wouldn't* Dream date Minx? The two Slytherins were practically *made* for each other, by old pureblood standards. Both came from ancient, rich, and noble wizarding families; Minx's parents must have been over the moon when they found out their daughter had upgraded from George's scrawny little filthy-blooded arse to the tall, blond, rich Selwyn heir...

George was pulled out of his thoughts by Wilbur's sudden initiation of an impromptu concert. For once, he found himself agreeing with Technoblade's overdramatic groans.

The opening notes to the song began, forcing George to strain his ears even harder in order to make out the muffled voices coming in through the compartment wall. He was only able to capture bits and pieces in between song lyrics.

*"She's always asking, 'Am I alright?'"*

"Did you see how —"

*"Merlin, her presence is a delight,"*

"And he looked —"

*"Don't want to let her out of my sight."*

"—Minx, so good."

*"Oh, but our time is short."*

"I can't believe you two—"

*"And, yes, she always does that one thing."*

"—so cute together."

*"Scratches her tattoo when it's itching"*

"I'm not gonna miss h—"

*"I always wish that I could help her,"*

"—at all. Honestly the happiest I've ever—"

*"I'll take it as a taunt"*

"—Without him."

*"I think that at the end of June,"*

"And you finally realized you like—"

"WELL, WELL, IF IT ISN'T WILBUR SOOT!"

George wanted to scream in frustration when both the muffled voice and Wilbur's song were cut short by yet another shouted greeting.

A tall, blond, and wild-eyed Tommy stood in their doorway with his hands on his hips. Somehow, no one had heard the boy's stomping footsteps marching down the hallway until it was too late and the young Gryffindor was already standing before them.

"And Technoblade," he added, acknowledging the boy's presence.

"And their irrelevant entourage," Eret snorted, catching George's eye with a smirk.

"I was just *getting* to you! Honestly, I've never met someone so impatient and *rude* in my entire

life!" Tommy scoffed, sliding into the compartment with the most confidence George had ever seen in a twelve-year-old and sitting himself right between Technoblade and Wilbur, "I mean, at *least* let me finish before *accusing* me of— of being the worst fuckin human being on the planet! Is that what you think of me?! You think I'm like— like a *terrorist* for addressing my good friends Wilbur Soot and Techno Blade before you?! Now that's just— that's so fucked up. You're fucked up, Eret. That's self centered of you, that is. You're—"

"You're right Tommy, I'm sorry. Truly, what was I thinking?" Eret cut him off, saving everyone from an undoubtedly neverending speech about how self centered and fucked they were.

Tommy clamped his mouth shut, considering the words before opening it again. "Yeah, well, clearly you weren't, right? Because— because if you were then you'd know that's a fucked up thing to imply."

"Mhm."

"Good, because *before* you started fuckin harassing me about not saying *hello* to you, I was gonna ask you lot what you got up to this summer. Since I *care* and am a *good person* and not a *dickhead*."

"Well, unluckily for us, you were with us the entire summer, Tommy, so it looks like you already know. Congrats! You can leave now." Techno said from his smushed up position against the compartment wall.

Tommy eyed Technoblade in an entirely unimpressed manner. "You dickheads are really proving you're roommates, you know that? All you lot do is think about yourselves, you're all like 'Me! Me! Me! He's talking about me!' That's what your head is like all the time, I can't believe *you're* meant to be the smart fellas— OBVIOUSLY I was talking to Big Man Gogs and King — er, King in the gender neutral sense — Eret! FUCKS SAKE use your HEAD!" Tommy yelled, grabbing the sides of Techno's head and shaking it.

"GET OFFA ME BEFORE I DROP-KICK YOU!"

"ERM, WELL—" George cut in, trying to stop a full blown fight from breaking out, "I, uh, I mostly worked this summer."

"Worked?!" Tommy grimaced, releasing Technoblade. "Why the bloody 'ell wouldja do *that* ?"

"I dunno, to... help my parents?"

"What?" Tommy asked, his face contorting with confusion. "Like chores?"

"Erm— a bit more than chores, but yeah."

"You were working this summer?" Wilbur inquired further, looking mildly concerned.

"Yeah, that's why I couldn't hang out with you and Techno. I'm pretty sure I mentioned it, actually."

An awkward pause ensued in which George's friends looked at each other sheepishly. Eventually, the banter resumed when Tommy broke the silence by saying something wildly inappropriate, though Wilbur kept glancing back at George.

"You know..." he whispered, leaning towards him as he moved to put away his guitar, "You can always tell me if you ever feel overwhelmed. I know you don't really like to talk about your

personal life, but I'm your friend, you know?"

George acknowledged the statement with a nod. "Thanks."

"Just..." Wilbur trailed off, searching for the right words. "Take care of yourself. And if you ever feel like you can't take care of yourself, let me know so I can help." Wilbur's eyes were earnest. Caring.

"That means a lot. Thank you, Wilbur."

In response, the curly haired boy clasped a hand on his forearm and smiled reassuringly. The warmth radiating off the action was so comforting that George was soon nodding off to the steady sounds of his friends' pleasant conversation.

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As the shadow of Hogwarts castle became visible from their compartment window, Techno nudged Wil and nodded towards the door.

"What?" the other Ravenclaw asked, staring at him blankly.

Techno rolled his eyes. "Prefect cart. That's a thing we gotta head to."

"Oh." The boy shut the book he'd been reading, stuffing it into his bag before standing up. "Do we have to bring our stuff with us?"

"Eh, I'm not trustin anyone with my carry-on," Techno replied, shouldering his own bag before heading out the door.

Eret waved to them from their seat, trying to stay quiet so as to not wake up George or Tommy, who had fallen asleep by some pure miracle. "Good luck boys."

"Thanks."

"Wait—" Wil whisper-shouted as Techno let the door slam shut in his face. When Wilbur finally clawed it open in spite of the five different bags balanced precariously in his arms, he gave Techno a scowl. "A little *help* ?"

"I've got frail arms, Wil, I'm not strong like you—"

At his friend's continued glare, he gave in. "Okay," he sighed, pursing his lips and accepting the two bags Wil shoved his way.

Once all bags were accounted for, the two friends marched towards the furthestmost cart all the way in the back of the train, where they joined a growing number of badge-wearing students.

"Psst, Techno."

"Mm."

"Don't you think there's an awful lot of students heading to the prefect cart now?" Wil whispered.

Techno glanced behind him, and then ahead of him. Now that Wil mentioned it, there really *were* a large number of people who were going in the same direction as them.

"Y'think they were *all* made prefects?" Wil asked, tapping his own pin lightly.

"Maybe. But why?"

"It's rather strange, isn't it? At first I thought maybe Philza Magic pulled some strings and couldn't decide between the both of us or something, but this... there's too many for it to be a mistake."

"Mm." Techno nodded in affirmation.

"I suppose they'll let us know once we get there."

"Mm."

Before, Techno thought that maybe Hogwarts had gotten rid of the 'one boy, one girl' thing and was just choosing prefects based on merit. But Hogwarts was too traditional to let go of their customs, so it wasn't exactly the strongest assumption he'd ever made. Now that he saw just how many people were mailed badges, though, it really blew his first theory out of the water.

So then, what? Was Hogwarts doubling up on authority figures? It'd make sense to anyone who picked up a newspaper lately; it didn't take a genius to see that things were tense in Magical Britain. But why would they give more authority to *students*? That seemed... not smart, to say the least. Dumb even. Stupid. Very much an action the previous headmaster would have taken, not McGonagall.

Techno sighed, keeping his head up as the door to the prefect cart was held upon by the person in front of him.

The place was a lot more open than the other carts. Instead of compartments separating them into comfortable private spheres, there were benches all lined up in rows where everyone had to breathe the same air as everyone else.

Disgusting.

"Ay, Techno!" a voice called from one of the center aisles. Techno glimpsed a mop of black and white hair amid the crowd and smiled.

"Eighty," he called out in greeting, tugging Wilbur towards his quidditch rival. " *You're* a prefect? They must really be runnin outta options on your side."

GB80 snorted. "You're telling me? Apparently my idiot roommate *Eric* got picked too. What the heck's up with that?"

"What a coincidence, I've also got an idiot roommate who got picked to be prefect." He nodded towards Wilbur, who spluttered indignantly.

"Guess it's one pro and one noob instead of one girl and one boy, huh?" Eighty elbowed him, gesturing for the two to sit beside him. "Kinda weird though, now that I think about it. I'm not exactly the worst student on the planet, but I'm not the *best* rule-follower, y'know? I can only be the best at one thing, and quidditch is life, so studying isn't a top priority either. I always thought being a prefect was for scrubs."

Techno hummed in consideration. Now that Eighty brought it up, he realized the same thing could

probably be said about him. Prefects were supposed to be exemplary — role models, even. The kinda kids who worked long and hard, not ones who fell asleep in class while still somehow getting 'Outstanding' on all their end of year reports. The kinda kids who *didn't* force their friends to crash graduation parties to send off their favorite seniors in style. The kinda kids who *didn't* get attacked because they ignored curfew laws and became the reason harsher laws were instituted. They were mentors, leaders, collaborators.

They were nothing like Techno.

Wil kinda made sense. He was fun and lovable, while still following the rules (unless Techno was involved). He liked learning and studying and took every class seriously. He was the kinda guy who little first years *loved* listening to and actually approached for help if they needed it. He was perfect prefect material!

So then...why was one person who fit the bill to a tee chosen alongside someone who was almost entirely the opposite of what Hogwarts has historically wanted?

"You thinkin hard, mate?" Wil asked.

"Mm." Techno grunted in affirmation. "This multiple prefects thing is weird."

"Yup, hopefully they'll clear it up soon, cuz honestly I do *not* wanna be running after any more first-years. I've had enough of that from Astelic, Sammy, and Purpled in the past two years. Plus if I have to be prefect *and* quidditch cap this year I'm just gonna drop and go pro now."

Techno snorted. "Yer not even the best player in the school. How do y'think you're gonna make it *pro*?"

"Pff, I haven't seen *anyone* better than me in this dump," Eighty said cooly, inspecting his nails. "You're all free."

Techno opened his mouth to retort but was abruptly cut off by an elbow to the ribs.

"Ow, what?"

"It's Philza Magic!" Wilbur exclaimed giddily, pointing to the front of the cart where Phil was standing.

The man waved to them with a smile and they happily waved back.

"Neat, that guy's cool," Eighty said, and the other two nodded in agreement. Cool was an understatement. Phil was the *best*.

"Alright, I'm sure you're all a little confused!" Phil yelled, calling the attention of the cart to him, "Tha's alright, makes sense, we didn't wanna hafta explain it over letter, so we'll just do it here now! Sadly for you, you're all gonna hafta miss the Sorting Ceremony this year." Phil paused to allow a disappointed murmur to come from the audience.

None came.

He coughed awkwardly, covering his mouth from the side as he feigned a high pitched voice. " *Oh no! Phil! We love the Sorting Ceremony, we're all so sad!*" Yes, I know, it's a travesty, but it's for a good cause. This year, and for the foreseeable future, we're gonna be... switching up the way prefects are picked."

An intrigued murmur rose through the students. New wasn't exactly synonymous with good in Hogwarts, but it *did* mean interesting.

"We, erm, wanted the old method to still have a fighting chance, but we also wanted this year's prefects to be exceptionally strong at defending themselves."

Techno nodded. It looked like he was right on that front, at least. It had something to do with the WAP situation.

"I'm sure you're all aware of the current controversy, and *exactly* where Hogwarts stands on it, but in case it wasn't clear: we do *not* support the way the ministry is pressuring children into donating blood for their cause." Phil spoke firmly, daring anyone to object to the statement. "Hogwarts's mission is to protect its students first and foremost. Unfortunately, that's hard to do when the one you're protecting them from is this country's authority figure. We want you all to be safe, and that means..." he hesitated, clearly uncomfortable with what he had to say next. "That means that the most capable students will be selected for the defense of the student body."

A nervous chatter began to build up, and Phil allowed it. His eyes remained glued to the floor.

"Defense?" Wil whispered under his breath. "Don't— don't you think that's a little dramatic?" he chuckled anxiously.

"I dunno, Wil, but I don't think Philza likes it either."

Eighty sucked in air through his teeth. "Geez, things are *really* getting serious. But I think I get it now; they picked two candidates for each position, one who's like the old prefects and one who's... what they're lookin' for now."

Techno stared at Phil, the realization settling over him like an uncomfortable, scratchy blanket. Being a prefect wasn't the job it used to be. Now, it was about *fighting*. He would be expected to put himself on the line for others because he was stronger and more capable...and he wasn't upset by the idea.

If he'd been told a few years ago that he'd one day be a line of defense in Hogwarts's security system, he woulda laughed and then taken a nap. He wouldn't've even thought twice about it.

But this year was different. In the direct aftermath of the stupid prank Tommy pulled last summer, Techno felt useless. He felt like a dumb burden, someone who couldn't even be used as an effective *human shield*. He was supposedly one of the best wizards of his year and yet Tommy's prank proved that he couldn't do a single thing if someone tried to hurt his family.

So he'd gone back and studied. He found every book he could on every dueling spell ever created; defensive, offensive, inlawed, outlawed, modified, dangerous, explosive, catastrophic. It didn't matter if the spell hadn't been used in combat for centuries — he wanted, no, *needed* to know how to perform it.

Now, standing in the prefect's carriage, he realized that he was ready to be a defender. He was done talking and watching from the sidelines and gathering information and *waiting* for something to happen. Now it was time to strike.

When the train pulled up to the stop, Phil held his arm up, keeping everyone rooted to their spots for what felt like *ages* until it seemed like every other student had cleared out except the prospective prefects.

"Alright, follow me, lads. Didn't wantcha t'get caught up with the crowd and end up in the wrong

carriage." He chuckled, sliding the side door open and letting the students pour out.

Techno grumbled under the added weight of Wilbur's luggage, awkwardly clambering out of his bench as GB80 watched on in amusement.

"Fer cryin out loud, Wil, just use an extension charm," he hissed at his roommate.

"I *did* , for all of these! You already knew that!" Wilbur huffed. "Not all of us can *do* minimalism, Techno. Please."

Techno frowned, opting to glare at the back of Wilbur's head instead of gracing him with a response.

They trudged out of the train and right into a cramped carriage before heading off to...not the Sorting Ceremony, thank Merlin. Techno settled in his seat semi-comfortably, subtly maneuvering Wilbur's bag so that it rested more on GB80 than on himself.

"Whaddaya think Phil meant by 'wanting the old method to have a fighting chance'?" The Slytherin quidditch player asked, not-so-subtly shoving Wilbur's bags right back in his direction.

"Yeah, that *is* rather weird now that I think about it. I reckon we can't *all* be prefects, right? So then what's the point of the whole, 'one old, one new' thing?" Wil wondered aloud.

"Maybe they're gonna run some kinda test on us?" Eighty offered, leaning his head back against his arms.

Wilbur hummed in consideration. "What *sort* of test?"

"I think they're gonna have us duel," Techno said abruptly, causing the other two and a few other people in the cart to pause their conversations and turn to look at him.

" *Duel* ?!" Wilbur choked out, looking worried. "You really think so?"

"That'd be *sick* ." GB80 grinned. "I'd get to beat up Eric for *free* , no consequences!"

"Yeah, but if you win, you gotta be prefect." Techno pointed out.

"Worth." Eighty said easily, " *So* worth."

"No, I refuse to believe it." Wilbur shook his head. "There's no *way* they'd have us *duel* !"

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"The two individuals selected for each position will be dueling each other to determine which of you will be selected as the prefect of your year," Headmistress McGonagall said, pursing her lips in irritation as all the students began talking at once.

"Toldja so," Techno said as GB80 cheered at his side and Wilbur's jaw dropped to the floor.

"No way, *no way* , this is bonkers! You mean I have to duel *you* ? I'll die! You'll destroy me!" Wilbur cried.

Techno furrowed his eyebrows. He hadn't actually realized until that moment that he'd have to fight *Wil* for the position. He'd been so caught up in the idea of protecting everyone and putting all his studies to use that it'd completely slipped his mind.

He shook his head. He wasn't about to pull out any of the risky curses or hexes he'd been practicing against *Wilbur*. Those spells would just have to wait.

"Relax, I'll go easy on ya," he tried to reassure him, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"But I don't want to duel you! I don't want to fight you at all!" Wilbur turned his big, sad eyes on him. "You're my friend!"

Techno sighed fondly. "Yeah, you're my friend too, Wil."

"Then let's quit this thing together!" Wilbur declared resolutely.

Techno's smile dropped. "I'm *not* doin that."

"Wha— why not?!" Wilbur protested. "There— come on, there's no way you *actually* want to participate in this thing. It— it's mad! They're asking kids to duel each other to see which one of us gets to die first if the school gets attacked!"

"Nobody's *dyin*, Wil, it's a security measure."

The boy blinked at him. "You— have you lost it?" He chuckled mirthlessly. "Do you actually *agree* with all this?"

Techno shrugged, his hand falling off of Wilbur's shoulder as he turned to face McGonagall again.

"Surely you're having a laugh?" Wilbur insisted, prodding Techno's side. "Be honest with me, Techno. You think this things nuts and we should both walk away from this and possibly even report it to the ministry because—"

"Wil, you just don't GET IT," Techno sneered, smacking Wilbur's hand away. "You don't get any of it! You spent the whole entire summer with me, around my family, n' you still don't get it. Can't you see that some of us don't *get* to have the privilege of sittin' around and doin' nothing? I can't *not* do this. I have a chance to *defend* people, to practice keepin others safe! Don't you see how big of an opportunity this is for me?!"

Wilbur looked taken aback. He rubbed his struck hand gently as he admitted, "No... you're right, I- I don't get it. I don't see why the school's 'defenders' have to be us— why it has to be you! We're not adults! This isn't our fight!"

"This isn't *your* fight," Techno corrected, gritting his teeth. "Kids *shouldn't* need to fight and know how to defend themselves like this. It's *not* fair, but it's what we *hafta* do because of who we are."

"Who we— what does that even *mean* , Techno? What '*are*' you?!" Wilbur narrowed his eyes, putting the term in quotes.

Was Wilbur really *that* dense?

"A kid who's last living family member HAS NO MAGIC!" Techno spat.

Wilbur staggered back, looking at Techno with a mix of defiance and understanding.

"You wanna quit?" he went on, "Go ahead. I'm not throwin this chance away." He said the last part

with an air of finality, turning away from his friend.

"...Fine." Wilbur said, straightening himself up. "Neither am I."

"Hah?"

"You— you always think you have to do everything alone, that you're the only person on the planet that can handle things. You never let other people protect you, you never let yourself be the one who needs help or see that you have other options, it always has to be *you*," Wilbur continued. "So — So if I can stop you from doing this, maybe you'll finally be *forced* to sit down and realize that you can let other people do the work for you."

Techno scoffed. "You really think *you* can beat *me*? "

"Of course not!" he cried, and from the corner of his eye Techno noticed that the other boy was tearing up. "But I have to try! For you."

Techno gritted his teeth and closed his eyes, not wanting to feel sympathy or to let himself consider his friend's words. "Fine. It's a duel, then."

"NOW then, allow me to explain the rules," McGonagall announced loudly, settling the room down with one sentence. "I'm sure Mr. Watson has explained to you why we've selected you the way we have, but in case it wasn't made clear: one of you was selected based on your qualifications for being a prefect the same way we've been selecting prefects for years. The other was selected based on your observed skill in magical potential and spell-casting. We hope to give each selected student a fair opportunity to showcase their abilities and prove they are fit to not only uphold their prefect responsibilities, but defend should the need arise."

She paused, glancing over the audience one by one. "We...regret having to involve students in this matter, but we cannot allow ourselves to ignore the changing political climate around us and in the process leave you without a protective authority. I hope that you can all forgive us — forgive *me* — for this decision, and that you'll fulfill your duties to the best of your abilities."

Some students muttered in affirmation, others nodded, one even cheered, though they were quickly silenced. Techno kept his gaze firmly ahead of him.

"Very good. We will begin with Slytherin house, followed by Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and finally Gryffindor. Following the duels, you will all be served your meals here and then be released to your respective dormitories. Eric Gregoire and Andrew Gémure-Boye, please make your way to the dueling platform where Mr. Watson is standing."

She gestured to the far right side of the room where Phil stood and waved. Eighty grinned, practically skipping towards the man while his roommate shuffled over with *far* less enthusiasm.

"Alright lads, your objective is to either disarm the other guy or to get him to fall to the ground. Y'can't summon anything alive, y'can't get physical, y'can't transfigure the other guy beyond repair and y'can't do anything that'll land someone in the hospital. I reserve the right to call foul on anything that looks overkill or unnecessary. Clear?" Phil raised an eyebrow at the pair.

"Clear!" GB80 exclaimed while Eric swallowed and nodded.

"Wands at the ready... begin!"

"*E-expelliarmus* !" Eric stammered, flailing his wand wildly as it gave off two spurts of red light and then died down.

"Pfft, you're literally *so* free," Eighty snickered. "*Flipendo* !" The spell flew directly at the other boy, sending him sprawling to the floor much harder than it should have. The quidditch player must've held the spell longer than necessary, but judging by his easy smile that was probably his intention. "GG."

"Congratulations Mr. Gémure-Boye on your victory and your newfound title as Slytherin prefect. Use it well," McGonagall said. "Next up: Daviana Davis and..."

Techno tuned her out, rolling his eyes. That was *extremely* anticlimactic. Not that he expected much from Eighty's roommate, but this place was looking like amateur hour. Within another ten seconds Davis was named Slytherin prefect and it was on to Hufflepuff.

The event was... embarrassing. It wasn't *dueling*, it was just a lame back and forth of *expelliarmus* and *flipendo* until something hit. It wasn't gonna teach him *anything* ! Half the people picked were hardly *good*, they just didn't suck as bad as their awful opponent. Here he was, finally getting his chance to learn real fighting, only to witness attacks that could barely help him fight off a toddler.

"—Technoblade and Wilbur Soot!"

Techno shook himself out of his self-pitying thoughts. If this was all he had, then he'd just make do. He marched up to the platform with Wilbur trailing behind him, his stoic expression barely cracking as Philza greeted them with a warm smile.

"You know the rules?"

Techno nodded once, settling on his side of the platform while Wil took the other.

"Good, I'm rooting for you both, yeah? Make me proud!"

He gripped his wand tightly, narrowing his expression. He *would* make Phil proud. He'd make his mom proud, he'd make *everyone* proud, but first...he had to let Wil down.

"Wands at the ready... Begin!"

"*Expelliarmus!*" Wilbur cast.

"*Protego!*" Techno shot back, watching as the spell ricocheted off an invisible barrier in front of him and hit the wand out of an unsuspecting Hufflepuff's hand.

"Damn, first new one I've heard all day," someone in the crowd snickered.

"Incredible, what an honor to witness," another kid replied, though the individual sounded completely genuine and entirely lacking the sarcastic tone that Techno was expecting.

These guys wanted to see something new? He'd show them new. "*Stupefy!*"

"*Expelliarmus!*"

The spells clashed against each other, sparking violently before dissipating in a cloud of smoke.

"*Immobulus!*"

"*Expelliarmus!*"

"*Flipendo!*"

"*Expelliarmus!*"

"Can't you cast anything *else* ?!" Techno exclaimed.

Wilbur glared in response. "*Expelliarmus!*"

"*Protego!*"

"*Expelliarmus!*"

"*Protego!*"

"Go on, Wil, try knockin him down!" Phil said encouragingly from the sidelines.

"I don't *want* to! *Expelliarmus!*"

"*Protego!*"

" *Augh* !" Wil groaned, burying his face in his hands. "I don't want to duel him! I don't want to knock him down or— or hurt him, I just want my friend to not feel like he has to put himself on the frontlines when something dangerous happens! I just want him to be *safe* ! And that won't happen if he wins!"

"*Expelliarmus.*"

Wilbur's wand clattered to the floor and the boy followed suit, hanging his head low as he picked up the instrument dejectedly.

Techno tucked his own wand away, screwing his eyes shut as he counted his breaths. This... wasn't the way it was supposed to go. He was doing this to *protect* his family, yet here he was hurting it instead. He sighed and marched up to Wil, kneeling down beside him and wrapping him in a firm hug.

"I just want you to be safe, Techno." Wil whispered, voice muffled against his robes.

"I know... I'm sorry."

"No you're not." Wil laughed humorlessly, sniffing. "When people are sorry they regret their actions. But you'd do this all over again if you had to, wouldn't you?"

"...Yeah."

Wilbur sighed, finally reciprocating the embrace, "Then promise me you'll practice so hard that no spell could ever touch you, alright? *Promise* ."

"I promise."

"You better mean it, cuz— cuz if you die out there I'll kill Tommy so he'll bother you in the afterlife for eternity."

"I *really* promise. I swear." Techno said frantically, tightening his hold on Wil.

"Good." He laughed again, and this time it was real.

"You fought well, boys." Phil said earnestly, patting them both on the back as he helped them to their feet. "I'm proud a'you. *Both* of you." He squeezed their shoulders affectionately. "And don't

you worry, Wil. S'long as I'm around nothin'll get to our boy Techno, I swear it. Whatever tries to gettin would have to go through Philza Magic first."

McGonagall cleared her throat as the pair were escorted off the platform, "Congratulations Mr. Technoblade on your victory and your newfound title as Ravenclaw prefect. Use it well. Next up: Adele Robinson and..."

"Psst, hey man." Someone elbowed Technoblade in the side as the girls took to the platform.

He quirked an eyebrow at the student, recognizing him as the one who was whispering about his spells during his duel. Brown skin, rectangular glasses, one shining silver stud on his left ear. "Mm."

"Just wanted t'say your spells were *hella* nice. For this crowd, that's some serious talent."

Techno frowned at the weird, backhanded compliment. "Thanks?"

"Thaaaat probably came off really rude, ha! I just meant— whatever, you'll see."

"Yeah man, that stuff was really nice!" the guy beside the stranger cut in, bearing a wide smile that reached his dark blue eyes ten times over. "Honestly I was kinda blown away, you've got skill, dude!"

"Thanks." Techno said again, feeling a warmth in his chest at the sincere compliment.

"Anytime. You have fantastic reflexes, you must've put in a lot of work!"

"You could say that." Techno said, the corners of his mouth turning up a bit, "You both Gryffindor?"

"Aha, and *expert* duellists," the first guy said, popping his collar. "If you thought your little stunt with your buddy was cute? Oho, we're about to look *adorable* ."

The guy beside him chuckled as an arm was thrown around his shoulder.

"— Next up: Calvin Sixlvixin and Nestorio Shodim!"

"And the crowd goes wild *haaaaaaaah* !" The first guy — was he Calvin or Nestorio? — declared theatrically, tugging the both of them onto the platform. "Will Sixlvixin be able to defeat the *famous* Hex-Nestorio? Place your bets!"

"My money's on that Hex-Nestorio guy, he's got a cool nickname," the other one, presumably Nestorio, grinned good-naturedly, settling his wand into a ready position.

"Ooh, bad choice. He's gonna lose for sure." Calvin flicked his wrist, adjusting his glasses.

"You know the rules boys?"

"Yessir!" they said in unison.

"Wands at the ready... begin!"

"*Immobulus!*"

"*Protego! Calidum Aerem!*"

"Oh you *bastard* , I hate that one!" Calvin laughed, battling against the warm draft emitting from Nestorio's wand.

"Sorry buddy, you know I gotta—"

*"Flipendo!"*

The shot hit the boy's leg, cutting him off and sending him sprawling back. But just when Techno was sure he would hit the floor and the round would be over, Nestorio aimed his wand at the ground, using the hot air to push himself back up to his feet.

He wobbled unsteadily, trying to regain his balance, and Calvin's face lit up with a smirk.

"Let me help you there, buddy. *Glacius!*" A white beam shot out of his wand, encasing his opponent's foot in a block of ice.

"Hey, thanks man! Y'know, I really needed that. *Flagrante!*"

"AY CHILL!" Calvin cried, ducking to avoid a spell that never came. "Wait, *bruh* ."

The ice melted away from Nestorio's foot and he instantly kicked off his shoe, hissing out a laugh as the footwear emanated a searing heat. "I'm not even gonna lie, that kinda hurt. My poor toes."

"Not as much as *this* is gonna hurt. *Bombarda!*"

Techno winced. The *exploding* charm? Was he trying to *kill* the other guy?!

*"Wingardium Leviosa!"*

The discarded shoe flew up into the air, clashing directly with the spell and exploding into a shower of leather and rubber.

"Pause, time out!" Phil announced, causing both boys to straighten out of their dueling positions, "That was too much. No more explosions, alright?"

"Sorry," Calvin said sheepishly. At least he had the decency to be a little embarrassed.

"Good. Wands at the ready... continue!"

*"Obscuro!"*

*"Rictusempra!"*

Both spells hit and instantly Calvin was doubled over in a fit of laughter as Nestorio clawed desperately at the binding around his eyes.

"Merlin's BEARD I hate this one even *more* !" Calvin choked out, battling against the laughing fit that had overtaken him thanks to the tickling charm.

The bind fell off from Nestorios eye and he smiled wide. "End of the line, buddy. I'm sorry. *Expelliarmus!*"

"No!" Calvin shouted through his laughter, but it was too late. The spell hit him directly in the arm, his wand wobbled unsteadily in his hand, and... nothing.

"Heh?" Techno raised an eyebrow. Nestorio's form and pronunciation was *perfect* , so what the



heck happened?

"You're joking," Nestorio balked. "That hit!"

Calvin stretched up to his full height, still laughing, though this time it was dramatically sinister and not the result of a tickling charm.

"Oh, Nestor, buddy," he tutted, revealing the handle of his wand. "Does *this* look familiar to you?"

The audience muttered curiously and the other Gryffindor gasped.

" *No.* "

"Yes."

"Cal."

"Say hello to my new and improved disarming-proof wand, *pal* ! This nifty little sleeve only cost... not that much, and it makes me totally immune to any of your stupid *expelliarmus*' s!"

"Is that even allowed?" Techno asked loudly and Calvin shot him a frown.

"Dude, what the hell?"

"Well... it's not exactly cheatin' since he didn't know this would be happenin so... seems fine to me," Phil shrugged.

"Ohhh my gosh, okay." Nestorio squared his shoulders. "No problem!"

"Big problem, pal. Very big problem. For you."

"*Sagittas!*"

"Oh, come on! *Incendio!*"

An arrow came flying out of Nestorio's wand, and Calvin quickly matched it with a well placed fire strike.

"*Langlock!*"

Nestorio's eyes widened, the jinx hitting him square in the chest.

"Hah!" Calvin exclaimed. "Thank *Merlin* , if this guy gets too many arrows out it's over. Pack your bags, people— *woah!*"

In spite of the fact that Nestorio's tongue was tied to the roof of his mouth and he couldn't cast any verbal spells, an arrow whizzed right past Calvin's hand, nicking one of his fingers as it sailed by.

"*Huh?* How. How. Explain how."

Nestorio just smiled, gesturing matter of factly to his mouth before firing another shot.

"*Protego!*" Calvin cast. "I'm so mad. I'm done. You still had the thing cast, what the *heck*— *Protego! Incendio! STOP!*"

Techno watched the back and forth intently, mapping each minute movement in his head. Nestorio was smart, keeping his mouth shut to not reset the charm he had active, but Calvin was *strong* .

And even though the other boy was struggling, Techno found himself favoring him. His dueling style was aggressive, but practical, and he obviously knew his opponent well. It was *exactly* how Techno wanted to be.

"*Relashio!*" Nestorio cast, the Langlock jinx having worn off.

"FINALLY!" Calvin threw his head back in relief, not caring as the charm hit him straight on. His wand wobbled, but ultimately stayed put. "Yeah, the revulsion jinx doesn't work either, but points for creativity."

"Hey, I'll take it!" Nestorio shrugged. "*Stupefy!*"

"*Stupefy!*" Calvin shot back, shielding his eyes as the two spells exploded against each other. "It's been fun, Nestor, but I'm ending this now. *Projiice Corpus!*"

"*Wah !*" Nestorio went soaring backwards, his head just barely missing a low hanging chandelier.

Phil tensed, raising his arms, "Alright, enough—!"

"I got this!" Nestorio cried hastily, still tumbling down to the ground "*Impedimenta!*"

He cast the spell on himself, slowing down his momentum just seconds before he hit the ground. Only, it was too late. With his slowed movement, there was no way Nestorio would be able to right himself back to his feet. The fight was going to go to Calvin. Techno smiled to himself.

"Oh Nestor, Nestor," Calvin tsked, shaking his head fondly as he twirled his wand between his fingers, "Tough luck—"

"*Accio Calvin Sixlvixin's wand!*"

"*Huh?!*" Calvin's eyes snapped open.

"What?!" Techno cried, watching incredulously as the wand flew out from between Calvin's fingers only a fraction of a moment before Nestorio's back hit the ground.

The room went silent, and then there were cheers.

"WHAT?!" Calvin's mouth hung open. "This man is insane. This man is INSANE. *Nestor!*"

"Good duel, buddy." Nestorio grinned, pulling himself up into a seated position in slow motion.

"Good duel, *good duel?!* " Calvin ran up to his opponent, clasping a hand around his forearm and tugging him up to his feet so he could shake him violently. "That was literally the coolest thing I've *ever* seen! I— I'm in awe. I'm your biggest fan."

"Does that mean you want me to sign this for you?" Nestorio asked, lifting the other boy's wand up with a smirk.

"PLEASE!"

"Congratulations Mr. Shodim on your *thrilling* victory and your newfound title as Gryffindor prefect." McGonagall's voice boomed over the din of the crowd. "Use it well."

"He WILL!" Calvin called back, lifting his friend into a bone crushing hug and waddling awkwardly off the platform with the boy still in his arms.

"Thank you, Mr. Sixlvixin. Next up: Hannah Rose and—"

"That was bloody brilliant," Wilbur whispered in awe, his eyes following the two Gryffindor boys as they praised each other on a duel well-fought.

"You could say that again." Techno nodded, his mind still racing from the action-packed fight.

If the other ones looked like a joke *before*, now they were just depressing. Techno wanted nothing more in the *world* than to learn how to fight like that.

"I'm gonna go talk to 'em." He said to Wilbur, who patted him on the back in reassurance before giving him a light push in the direction of the duo.

Techno balled up his fists, settling his nerves before approaching them. "Hey—"

"You!" Calvin exclaimed, grabbing Techno's arm in a good natured but kinda weird handshake.

"Yeah, I—"

"SHHH sh sh, wait one sec, wait one second, you gotta see this." He grabbed the sides of Techno's head and twisted it in the direction of the platform. "This girl's about to get demolished. Fastest duel of the day."

"Uh..."

"Just look!"

Phil stood between the two girls. "You know the rules?"

"You got this, Hannah!" Nestor cheered. The two Gryffindor boys threw a pair of thumbs up at one of the girls on the platform.

She smiled at them, settling into her dueling position without even bothering to get her long, light brown hair out of the way.

"That hair seems like a hazard," Techno muttered.

Calvin snorted, elbowing his friend. "This dude said *hazard*, aHA! Watch this sick play right now bro, don't even blink or you'll miss the whole fight."

*Yeah right .*

"Wands at the ready... begin!"

" *E—* "

" *Flipendo!* "

The other girl was flattened to the ground in a matter of seconds, hardly even getting to finish a syllable of her incantation. She lay on the floor in shock, a slack-jawed expression on her face.

"You... weren't kiddin'," Techno said incredulously, eyes wide.

"Well then. Congratulations, Ms. Rose, on your victory and your newfound title as Gryffindor prefect. Be sure to use it well," McGonagall announced. "Now that the duels are complete, you may all indulge yourselves in the food provided here before leaving to your respective common

rooms."

She waved her arm and a long table on the far side of the room became covered in all sorts of piping hot foodstuffs. The crowd immediately dispersed, everyone pairing off to grab dinner and talk excitedly about the last two duels they'd spectated.

"Wh— what in Merlin's name?" Hannah's opponent stammered, trying unsteadily to clamber back up to her feet. "How did you do that so fast?"

"I just practice a lot." She shrugged, smiling at her and offering a hand. "Good effort though!"

The girl rolled her eyes, accepting the help. "Yeah right, you wiped the floor with me."

"Damn STRAIGHT!" Calvin hollered. "Hannah Hex-Hex Rose strikes again!"

"Hannah 'Hex-Hex' Rose?" Techno raised an eyebrow, putting the nickname in air quotes.

"Yeah, it's cuz she's so fast, she'll hex you twice before you can even say her name!" Calvin grinned. "Pretty neat, huh?"

"...sure."

"So, what'd you wanna talk about? Come to tell Nestor how absolutely *disgusting* his plays were?" he asked, nodding his head towards his new prefect, who was currently hunched over on the floor picking up shreds of his exploded shoe.

"No, I wanted to talk t'you."

"Seriously?" Calvin quirked an eyebrow at him. "Lil ol me? You *do* know I lost, right?"

Techno waved him off. "Doesn't matter, you're strong and fight like an absolute monster. You only lost cuz yer enemy is someone who's fought you enough times to know when you stop payin attention. If this was real and your opponent was someone new, they'd've lost."

Calvin blinked at him in surprise. "Damn dude, I really appreciate that, but don't sell Nestor short —"

"I'm *not*. I'm saying you're incredible. Nestorio was the one picked by the *old* standards, you're the guy they were lookin' for through the lense of fighting prowess."

"Well, why do you say that?" Calvin asked, folding his arms with a sniff. "Maybe *I'm* the smart, studious babysitting type."

Techno gave him an unimpressed look. As if on cue, Nestorio came right up to his side, cradling the remains of his own shoe in his hand.

"I...don't think I can *reparo* this one." He said sheepishly. "Really nice *bombarda* though! You almost had me."

Calvin snorted. "Psh, *please*, you read me like a book!"

"But a really complex, well written book! Not an easy read, I'd nominate you for a Daily Prophet best seller if I could," the prefect said earnestly. "Mind if I duplicate your shoe so I'm not walking around in my socks, by the way?"

"*Duh*, do you even need to ask?" He pulled up the ends of his robes and stuck his foot out.

"*Geminio!* Thanks Cal, you're the best. Don't know what I'd do withoutcha, buddy." And with a final cast of *Incendio* to get rid of the remains of his old footwear, the boy departed from them to eat his dinner.

"Man, I love that guy. He's the best." Calvin grinned, speaking just loud enough so that Nestorio would hear him and smile wide over his shoulder.

"Exactly. The man's a ray of sunshine. Y'expect me t'believe he's *not* old prefect material?"

The Gryffindor sighed. "Yeah, alright, fair enough. So you're saying I'm cool and strong and even McGonagall knows it. So what?"

"I wanna know where y'trained to do all that."

The boy adjusted his already loose tie to an even looser position. "Ha! Dunno what you're talkin about there, pal. There's no training involved, I just listen in class and practice hard."

Techno leaned into the other boy's personal space, whispering under his breath. "Listen Calvin, I don't care if it's against school rules. Hell, I don't even care if it's against the *law*. I *need* t'learn how to duel like you. If y'can't show me where you train, fine, but at least teach me personally. I'll even pay you—"

"Is this about that promise you made to your buddy?" Calvin asked, cutting him off.

Techno tsked, "It's *bigger* than that. Have you *seen* what's going on outside this school? Some of us aren't even safe in our own *homes*, I— I *hafta* know how to do the things you do, man. You're my last option."

Calvin paused, looking off to the side as he chewed on his lip in thought.

"*Augh*, fine."

"Fine?"

"Yes. *Fine*. I'll show you where we train— BUT but," he dropped his voice to the lowest volume possible, "I'm trusting you. We don't usually do that with strangers, okay?"

Techno breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank you. Y'don't understand how much this means t'me."

"Oh, *trust me*. We know."

Before Technoblade could question the Gryffindor on his strange wording, the boy was called over by Nestorio, who waved him over with an extra plate in hand.

Calvin nodded in his friend's direction. "I'll reach out, make sure to keep an eye open."

And with that, he departed, leaving Techno alone with his thoughts.

"So, how did it go?" Wilbur asked, materializing in the empty space Calvin left behind.

Well, alone with his thoughts and Wil.

"Good. Fantastic, actually. Never thought I'd say this, Wil, but I think I'm gonna like bein a prefect."

Wilbur beamed at him, thrusting a plate piled high with food in his direction. "Good. Now eat."

~~~~~

"Today I will be pairing you all off to work on a three month long group assignment," Professor Babbling announced, hardly flinching when the entire class groaned in protest.

George didn't even have it in him to get excited over the idea. The school year had only *just* started and he'd already been making incredible efforts to avoid his former best friend during their shared classes. A group project where he *didn't* get to pick his partner sounded exactly like the kind of thing that would summon Murphy and his stupid laws to ruin everything.

"The project will not be difficult, and will act as a substitute for the majority of your homework assignments over the period of time that you are expected to be working on it. It will also provide you with an excellent opportunity of honing your team building skills in the face of unfamiliar partnerships. So I ask that you please remain calm and trust in my decisions."

The announcement seemed to calm some of the students down, though a few still muttered about it being unfair under their breaths.

"Thank you. Now, the groups will be as follows: Abigail Ackerman and Jack Johnson, Giorgi Baratashvili and Catherine Hughes..."

George listened to his professor call out his classmates' names with bated breath. He honestly didn't care who his partner was as long as he wasn't paired with Dream; he was not even remotely ready to have a face-to-face conversation with the Slytherin boy yet.

Not Dream not Dream, please please please for the love of everything that is good do not put me with Dream.

"...Clay Selwyn and Jebediah Schlatt..."

George breathed a sigh of relief.

"...and George Davidson and Justine Minx."

His heart dropped. Of course if it wasn't Dream, it had to be Dream's girlfriend. Why couldn't the universe just let him be?

"Now then, if you could all rearrange yourselves so that you are seated with your partners, I can begin explaining the project to you."

George begrudgingly lifted his head and met Minx's eyes from across the room. Predictably, she didn't look thrilled about their partnership either. She nodded sharply towards the empty seat beside her, making it clear that George was going to be the one moving all of his things.

They didn't say a word to one another throughout Professor Babbling's explanation of their upcoming assignment. The old witch explained that if they decided to pursue the study of Ancient Runes as a career one day, they would need to get used to undertaking long, painstaking translation projects. To prepare them for this, she was assigning their class a long translation task in which each pair would be translating a never-before-deciphered Runic text from cover to cover. They would be graded on the accuracy of their translations and the quality of an accompanying essay.

"You may have the rest of this class period to familiarize yourselves with your assigned text and to discuss your strategy with your partner. Carry on!"

With a clap of her hands, the professor summoned several large, dusty tomes which floated through the air until every pair had a book as thick as a human arm resting in front of them.

Steadily, the room filled with the sound of muttered conversations and flipping pages, while George and Minx stayed resolutely silent, the book between them remaining closed.

George frowned bitterly, folding his arms across his chest. Honestly, this was possibly *worse* than being paired with Dream. He had absolutely no desire to cooperate with his *ex-girlfriend* who thought she could just flail around slurs because George's lack of romanticism 'hurt her feelings'. Minx was a person who for some reason thought her shittiness entitled her to make other people feel like shit, too. At least Dream could take a bloody hint; Minx sent owl after owl to harass George in his own home after their breakup. For fuck's sake, she'd been at Dream's throat when the boy tried to defend George!

Not to mention that she and Dream were now dating, of all things.

He gritted his teeth. Just *thinking* about their shared past made him want to scream. Or hex her. She'd probably go out of her way to ruin the project just to sink George's grade. It wasn't like she cared about her *own* grade, that was certain.

Minx sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Alright, let's just get this feckin thing over with so we never havta see each other again."

George snorted. "Right, all the owls you sent to my house *really* made me realize how much you *don't* want to see me."

"Oh *please* ," Minx sneered. "Are you seriously bringin that up now?! When was the last time I sent you an owl, *Georgie*? Are ye really so thick that you think I'm still interested in yer scrawny arse?!"

"No, you made it *abundantly* clear that you've moved on," he muttered, his stomach churning at the thought. He still couldn't believe that she'd gotten together with *Dream* . DREAM.

Minx narrowed her eyes at him. "Yer... yer *upset* that I don't like you anymore?" She laughed incredulously. "What, did ye think I'd be stuck on ye forever? Yer sad that ye don't have some girl fawnin over you anymore, is that it? Ye didn't even LIKE ME, George, ye don't get to cry now that the feelin is mutual!"

"I'm not! Go ahead and do whatever you want, I don't care!"

"It doesn't *sound* like ye don't care!" she said accusingly. "What did you expect, honestly? You wanted me to mourn our breakup and never date again? Swear to celibacy? Fucks sake, George, yer actin like the biggest arse on the planet!"

George scoffed, rolling his eyes. "That's rich coming from *you* ."

Minx stood abruptly from her seat, her chair screeching loudly before clattering to the ground. The entire class paused to turn their heads towards her curiously.

"Ye know what? Fuck you! When you wanna stop actin like a fuckin prick, we can get started on this piece of shite assignment, but until then I'm not fuckin talkin to you!" With that, she grabbed the tome and stormed out of the classroom, leaving everyone in an awkward silence.

Professor Babbling sighed, not having been fast enough to stop the girl from leaving. "Ten points from Slytherin for that outburst," she said simply.

George buried his face in his hands, rubbing his temples in irritation. This project was going to be hell.

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Over the course of the next couple of weeks the exact same scenario was repeated over and over again.

Runes class would begin, everyone would pair off, and George and Minx would sit in silence until one of them inevitably pissed off the other and Minx would leave angrily. It was *exhausting*. And worst of all, they were making absolutely no progress on the project. Not even a single *letter* had been translated. At this rate, they'd have nothing to submit but a blank piece of parchment and some newly discovered insults.

After yet another such class on a Monday afternoon, George plopped down into his seat in the Great Hall and stared at his lunch in contempt.

"Oi, what's got you down, mate?" Wilbur asked, his forehead crinkling in concern.

"Probably Minx," Techno said, stabbing a piece of chicken on his plate. "We've been gettin free entertainment at every Runes class for the past two weeks."

"Yeah, well, you got lucky with *your* partner." George grumbled, "She's, what, a Gryffindor prefect, was it?"

"Aw, c'mon, I can't imagine how anyone could be better than your racist ex-girlfriend, that sounds like a blast!" Techno drawled sarcastically, pointing his fork at George. "See, clearly *you're* the problem here. Maybe if you just worked together nicely with her then all yer problems would be solved and you'd be *best friends!*"

"Ugh, I HAVE been—" George paused, letting Technoblade's words run through his head again. He knew, logically, that the boy had been joking, but now that he thought about it, he realized that he really *hadn't* been trying to work together with Minx.

But of *course* he wasn't going to work with her! Minx had been nothing but awful to him for almost as long as he'd known her, and even after almost completely cutting off contact with him, she still somehow managed to make his life more complicated. Trying to cooperate with her would be like talking to a brick wall. A brick wall that constantly swears at you. He'd never get *anywhere* with her. He would just have to try to grab the tome next class and do the assignment on his own. It was his only option.

"George, mate, you alright?" Eret asked, waving a hand in front of his face.

"Y— yeah. I was just... thinking."

"I'm not tradin partners with you," Techno said immediately. "And Hannah's innocent, I'm not lettin you sacrifice her like some kinda *monster*."



"I wasn't *planning* on asking to trade," George huffed, though he probably should have. Maybe he could ask Schlatt to work with him so Dream and his *girlfriend* could work together instead. That way everyone would win.

"Well, I think Minx can't be all that bad," Wilbur said nonchalantly, barely noticing as every one of his roommates turned slack-jawed expressions his way.

"You— *what* ?!" Techno choked out.

"Wilbur, she called me a *mudblood* all because our date went wrong," George spluttered. "How on *earth* could she not be 'all that bad'?"

Wilbur winced. "I— well, it's just that she's quite good friends with Niki. I've asked her before if she knew about the stuff Minx's done, to warn her in case she didn't, but... Minx'd already told her everything. In fact, she even tried scaring her off with it before they became proper friends. I just think... she's not a very *good* person obviously, and you don't have to forgive her, but I don't think she's completely beyond reason."

George pursed his lips, wanting desperately to argue against Wil's point only to find that he honestly couldn't. It wasn't like Wilbur was excusing her actions. He was only saying that she might have developed a bit of logic since the incidents in their third year.

Techno tsked, "Well, that's... *fair* , I guess. Personally, if I were you, George, I'd've just buried myself and gotten it over with, but yer holdin up pretty well! Maybe you can actually exchange a sentence with her that doesn't include swear words next time. I'd love t'see it." He took a bite out of his food. "Only do me a favor, make sure y'do it *next week* cuz I've got some bets I don't wanna lose."

"You placed bets on them?" Eret asked, chuckling.

Wilbur frowned in disapproval. "Techno..."

"What can I say, it was funny and I also got paid. Couldn't ask for a better scenario." He shrugged.

George cradled his face in his hands, staring intently at the table as a small spat regarding the ethics of betting on your friends ensued over his head. Talking it out with Minx sounded like a *nightmare* , and that was if he was being optimistic. But at the same time he was tired of the incessant arguing they went through every class. If there was even the smallest, tiniest *fraction* of a chance that they really could make progress, then he may as well try it. It wasn't like the situation could get much worse anyway.

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George showed up to Ancient Runes the following week with newfound resolve. He was finally going to attempt to have an earnest conversation with his partner about their project. Even if Minx was beyond reason, he decided he'd soldier on and start deciphering the tome by himself.

When the Slytherin girl entered the classroom, George was surprised to see that she lacked her usual outward hostility. Her body language was still stiff, but for once George didn't get the immediate impression that she wanted to tear him apart limb from limb.

She sat down in her chair. George took a deep breath and readied himself to speak.

“Hey, so I wanted to talk to you about —”

“We need to feckin’ cooperate, George.”

The Ravenclaw’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. He thought getting Minx to say anything reasonable would be like pulling teeth; it didn’t even occur to him that *she* would be the first to extend an olive branch.

“I...was thinking the same thing, actually,” he admitted. The girl narrowed her eyes.

“Right. I’m jus’ gonna come out and say it — yer a right twat, George. But—” here she paused, holding up a finger before George could defend himself, “I’m not exactly a fuckin saint either.”

“*That’s* true,” George muttered under his breath. Minx pretended not to hear him.

“We’ve had our differences — many, *many* fuckin differences — but they’re not worth sacrificing our grade, right?”

“Right.”

“So even though you’re a close-minded eejit with a stick up his arse—”

At that, George’s fist came down hard on their desk, startling Minx out of her speech.

“So *I’m* the close-minded one? If I recall correctly, it was *you* who called me a—”

“Ten points from Ravenclaw, Mr. Davidson!” Professor Babbling called out, irritated. “There will be no voice-raising or fist-banging in my classroom!”

“Sorry, Professor,” he mumbled, ducking his head. When the class once more filled with the sounds of students collaborating, he turned his attention back to the Slytherin girl. “It was *you* who threw slurs around like they were confetti, so you have no right to call me closed-minded.”

Minx raised an eyebrow. “But I’m not the one who refused to even listen to my apology, Georgie. And I’m also not the one who cut off his supposed best friend without making any bloody effort to understand the inner fuckin turmoil he was going through, am I? An’ I’m not the one who continues to act all high n’ fuckin mighty when I have absolutely no feckin clue what the real world is like right now!”

The hissed accusations hit him like a train. His first instinct was to yell and defend himself, to refute every single one of her assertions and hurl an insult or two her way. But what surprised him about Minx’s declarations was that they really stung. His brain scrambled to put together a retort, to bite back somehow, but his thoughts were too frazzled.

“I...I did make an effort with Dream,” he said weakly, though the words felt wrong as he said them. Minx didn’t buy it.

“Sure. Ye gave him what, two minutes teh process his father’s news before ye handed him an ultimatum that you *knew* he couldn’t handle? If that’s what ye call makin’ an effort, then yer a few scats short of a dunghheap.”

George winced. “I didn’t read your letters because I was — and still am, by the way — very angry with you. Am I not entitled to my feelings?” he asked bitterly.

Minx shrugged. “Yer entitled to them, George, but if yer gonna go ‘round preachin’ peace an’ love an’ tolerance, ye better practice those feckin’ virtues. It isn’t feckin’ tolerant to refuse to hear someone out, now, is it?”

“But—”

“And I’m sorry, George. From the bottom of my shriveled black heart, I am beyond sorry for what I did to you in Year Three.” Minx’s eyes were big and earnest, and for a second George was transported back in time to that fateful night in the courtyard before their relationship met its demise. “There is *no* excuse for what I did. Yes, I was raised in a household where the word was used every day without consequences, but I fuckin’ knew better. And if you’d read my fuckin’ letters, ye’d have read how sorry I am, but since ye didn’t, I’m happy to tell you again: I apologize. And I’ve changed. I’m a different person than I was two years ago, and I spend every day tryin’ to undo the web of bigotry my parents spent years spinnin’.”

The words, the tone of voice, the vulnerability — it was all in such opposition to the version of Minx that existed in George’s head. He almost didn’t know what to do, now. How *was* a person supposed to respond to a heartfelt apology like that?

Forgiveness, whispered the voice in his head. But forgiveness wasn’t something one could just offer and be done with; it was something one had to properly process. Forgiveness meant moving on, and George didn’t think he could move on in a day.

But the wounds that Minx left him with two years ago were no longer fresh, he realized. They were scars that throbbed every so often but for the most part left him alone. Perhaps acknowledging them for what they were and taking steps to understand the source of their pain would help them fully heal.

“Alright,” he nodded. “I’m sorry as well. I should have read your letters; sending them back unopened was a dick move.”

Minx smiled and gestured towards the book on their desk. “Shall we start decipherin’ this shit, then? I reckon we’re a bit behind.”

George snickered and flipped open the first page of the tome.

The rest of the class passed surprisingly quickly. The two of them made an efficient pair when it came to translations. They formed a routine where one of them would read the runes out loud while the other would consult their textbook for clues, and by the time the class period was over, they successfully deciphered three whole pages.

Whatever this was, it wasn’t forgiveness. Not yet. But it was progress.

And it felt good.

Chapter End Notes

As always, please comment your thoughts! They really are what keeps this story going. Thank you to those who've stuck around — we're coming up on two years of

Like Magic (yikes! I feel old!) and it's thanks to you guys that this story keeps going.

Lots of love!

— Ken

Socials:

Ken's [twitter](#)

Ken's [tumblr](#)

Gra55's [tumblr](#)

Sophia's [twitter](#)

Chapter Twenty-Nine || Year Five

Chapter by [KangarooKen](#), [Serotonin103](#)

Chapter Summary

Sapnap throws George a party. Some other things happen, too.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! Thank you to Owly80 on Twitter for [this](#) fanart of our favorite duo!
And Grass also made fanart — check it out [here](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"—November first, Room of Requirement, 7:00 PM sharp, you won't wanna miss it!" Sapnap declared, shoving an invite into an unsuspecting Gryffindor's hand.

Dream raised an eyebrow at him, glancing over at Puffy with a questioning look only to be met with a shrug.

"Hey! We're gonna be throwing the biggest, most coolest, most RAGING birthday party of the year! Basically everyone in this school is gonna be there, you've gotta be a *major* loser not to make it. November first, Room of Requirement, 7:00 PM sharp, you won't wanna miss it!" The boy yammered excitedly, placing another invite into some random person's hands before clambering over them to get to the other side of the table.

"Hey Puffy! Niki! *Miiii* — uh, *Drea* — hm." Sapnap paused, looking hesitantly down at the invites in his hands.

Minx rolled her eyes. "Wow, what a feckin mystery, I wonder what it is yer tryn t'hide from us even though ye ANNOUNCED IT THE ENTIRE FOCKIN SCHOOL ALREADY!" she yelled, stabbing the food on her plate for emphasis.

Sapnap ran a hand through his hair nervously. "Okay! Alright, geez. Uh, there's gonna be a party in the Room of Requirement. No biggie if you can't make it, though—"

"Oh, is this for George's birthday?" Niki asked, plucking an invite out of Sapnap's hand before he could protest.

"Yes—! Uh, no? Maybe. D-depends?" Sapnap stammered, grimacing nervously as she read over the details.

"Relax, *Sappittus*, ye can't possiby give George a worse birthday than the fuckin mess that went on in year two. Even if ye invite *us*." Minx rolled her eyes, leaning her head against her hand as she continued stabbing her food absentmindedly.

"Besides, Minx and George already made up, didn't he tell you?" Puffy questioned.

"Wait, seriously? He *forgave* you?!" Sapnap asked incredulously, his eyebrows shooting up into his bandana.

"He didn't *forgive* me, we just... have an understandin. We don't wanna fockin avada ourselves in each other's presence anymore. That good enough?"

The boy gave her an impressed look. "Damn. I dunno what kind of apology you gave him for *that* to happen but it must've been good."

"It was fan-fuckin-tastic. Now what's this all about anyway? I thought Georgie wasn't big on parties, 'least not since he thought he was gettin fockin assassinated that one time." Minx paused and thought for a moment before adding, "How's Gogi feel about the fact that yer throwing the lad another party in that Merlin forsaken room?"

Dream winced. George's surprise thirteenth birthday party had been a disaster. He could still remember the terrified look on his former best friend's face when he walked into the room shortly after their other friends had taken his blindfold off; never before had Dream seen the Ravenclaw so terrified.

"Well, it's not actually in the Room of Requirement, it's in the Hog's Head Inn," said Sapnap.

"So why are ye tellin people to go to the feckin Room of Requirement?" Minx asked. Sapnap rolled his eyes like the answer was obvious.

"We're using the room to get to the inn! It's genius!"

"I still don't think I get it," Niki piped up. "How are we supposed to get to Hogsmeade from the Room of Requirement?"

Sapnap sighed. "How much do you know about the Battle of Hogwarts?"

Niki shrugged.

"Well," The boy cleared his throat, and Dream could already tell this was going to be long, "In the months leading up to the battle, a lot of Dumbledore's Army hid out in the Room of Requirement because of all the Death Eater teachers that were after them. While they were in there though they needed, like, food n stuff to live, but because of some transfiguration law the room couldn't materialize the food by itself. So insteaad it created a passage that led to the Hog's Head! And it's still there!"

"So we're supposed to take that passage to the Inn? How does Aberforth feel about that?" Puffy asked.

Sapnap snorted, waving his hand at the question. " *Please*, he doesn't give a shit about who's in his bar. As long as they're there and they're paying, that's good enough for him."

"And who exactly are you making pay for this? Hopefully not George," said Puffy.

The Gryffindor boy gasped dramatically, holding a hand over his chest. "Is that what you think of me?! You think I'd make Gogi pay for his *own* party? I'm hurt, Puffy, hurt."

"So you're paying?" Minx asked.

"Yes, and accepting donations from my very dear and very wealthy friends who wish to help contribute to the joyous day." He threw Minx and Dream a cheeky side eye, prompting the girl to

scoff.

“In yer dreams, Sappittus. I still feel like this’ll be *way* too much for George.”

“Nahhhh, he said he’s fine with it!” Sapnap dismissed. “We’re, like, actual teenagers now, its gonna be so fucking rad. This party’s actually gonna be outta this world — like, picture that rager that Cady threw in *Mean Girls*, then multiply that by, like, a hundred.”

“*Mean Girls?*” Dream questioned, at the exact same time that Minx demanded, “Who the fuck is Cady?”

Sapnap groaned, running a hand down his own face.

“Y’know what, it doesn’t even matter. The point is it’s gonna be lit, and no babies are invited. Spread the word! But, uh,” here he paused and shuffled his feet, “no pressure to come if, you know... yeah.”

At that moment, another Gryffindor boy leaped over to the table and tugged on Sapnap’s sleeve urgently.

“Dude!” Skeppy said frantically. “We have a problem!”

“Shit, what’s up?”

“Bad wants to come to the party.”

Sapnap looked confused. “Okay? We love Bad, what’s the problem?”

Skeppy just stared back at Sapnap until the other Gryffindor facepalmed.

“Oh FUCK, the firewhisky!” He exclaimed, inhaling sharply through his teeth. “Okay, uh, no biggie! Skeppy, we can deal with it. Just tell him that it’s, uh... spicy fruit punch!”

“In firewhisky bottles?” The boy gave him a flat, unimpressed look, “Dude, he’s not an idiot.”

“Nooo, but the guy would take your word for anything.”

“I don’t like lying to Bad, though!”

“But think of the party, Skep! The rager! We can’t afford any slip-ups!”

Now entirely preoccupied with the matter of Baddeus and underage drinking, the two Gryffindor fourth-years wandered away from Dream and the girls, leaving their little group to mull over his words at the Slytherin table.

“Sounds fun,” Puffy commented, eyeing the invitation Niki had snatched from Sapnap’s hand. “I wonder why they picked the Hog’s Head, though. Doesn’t exactly seem like George’s kinda place, does it?”

“Oh, please,” Minx answered, “the Raven-twat had nothing to do with the planning. As if goody two shoes Gogi would voluntarily spend his birthday around drunk teenagers.”

Dream stayed silent. Though the girls all knew about his recently realized feelings for the Ravenclaw boy, it was all too new to discuss. Too unsure. Too *personal*. Hell, he’d barely had the time and energy to process those emotions in his own head, let alone to discuss them with other people.

Just because Dream wasn't ready to talk about his feelings with the girls, though, didn't mean *they* weren't ready to ask him about them. Practically every day since he'd confessed his crush on George, there was at least one question about what his plans were.

But Dream didn't have any plans. Him liking George wasn't going to erase the months-long conflict they were in, nor did it guarantee that George would like him back. Just the thought of telling George how he felt made him want to throw up.

For all he knew, George was stick-straight. Sure, his relationship with Minx had been a disaster, but that definitely could have just been because they had zero chemistry and not because the guy was *gay*, no matter how much Minx insisted George played for the other team.

"What's with all the silent brooding, fuckface?" Minx demanded, elbowing Dream in the side to snap him out of his thoughts.

"Ow, you're one violent wench, you know that?"

"And yer an ugly cunt. So whadye say, we goin' to this shite or what?" she asked, gesturing towards the flier before them on the table.

"Eh, it doesn't look like my scene." Dream shrugged, hoping the response came off as casual. The girls didn't buy it.

"Dream, are you sure?" Niki prodded gently. "It might be fun to spend time with other people. I think Sappnap invited everyone in school."

"Plus, it would be a good time for you to finally talk to—"

"Nah," Dream cut Puffy off before she could finish. "I'm fine. I should spend the evening studying, anyway. I'm behind on work."

Minx snorted so hard that milk came out of her nose. "PFFFFT, yer gonna 'ave t'think of a better excuse than *that*, Selwyn."

"I don't need an excuse. I just don't want to go."

Thankfully, the girls dropped the subject, though Dream could tell from the look Minx gave him that the discussion wasn't over.

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*"I'll reach out, make sure to keep an eye open."*

Techno hadn't been able to stop thinking about those words since the day they were spoken to him. He'd been keeping *more* than just an eye open; his entire *being* was ready to receive Calvin's message at any given moment. Every stray owl, every tap on the shoulder, every bump in the hallway filled him with breathless anticipation, which was why he was completely disappointed in himself when he didn't see it coming the time it actually did.

"Hey, you think you can come help me out with something after this?" Hannah asked, taking a moment's break from scratching down the last few pages of their runes project.



"Depends, if it's too hard I'm quittin early," he said. The girl chuckled.

"Well, if it wasn't hard, I wouldn't need help with it," she replied, "but I'm sure you can handle it, otherwise I wouldn't have put in a good word for you."

Techno paused, looking up from his work with a raised eyebrow. She winked. He raised his eyebrow higher.

"Uh... Calvin's... thing?" she clarified awkwardly.

Oh. "OH." He'd never felt more wrongly sorted in his entire life. "You're a part of—? *Oh.*"

Techno almost slapped himself. Of course Hannah was a part of...whatever crazy duel training Calvin was doing. He'd seen her in action during the prefect selection on the train, but now it all made sense. "You put in a good word for me?" he asked probably too eagerly.

"Mhm. Calvin wasn't enough to convince everyone, and Nestor doesn't count since he likes everybody so...I helped you out." She shrugged, turning back to her work.

Techno blinked in surprise. *Everyone?* Just how many people were a part of this secret operation?

He leaned forward conspiratorially in his chair, a thought having suddenly popped into his head. "Did you guys... *plan* on you an' I bein partners on this runes project?"

"What? No, we don't have *that* kind of influence." Hannah snickered, giving him a funny look, "This was just a happy accident. Or maybe it was a sign."

A sign, huh?

He ended up finishing the rest of his part of the project in record time, itching to finally be let in on the Gryffindors' training. Once Hannah was done, she slipped their papers into the ancient tome and tucked it under her arm, nodding for Techno to follow her.

They trudged down the corridor and up several flights of stairs before finally winding up in Gryffindor tower.

"Good afternoon, Miss," Hannah said politely to the portrait of the Fat Lady.

"Good afternoon to you, Miss Rose! I see you've brought a guest." She eyed Techno suspiciously, taking a sip from the goblet in her hand.

"He's not staying for long, don't worry. I'm just here to drop something off." She waved the dusty tome in front of her.

"Very well, I suppose he's alright if he's a friend of yours." She sighed, "What's the password, dearie?"

"*Porcus caudum.*" The portrait swung open, revealing the interior of the Gryffindor common room.

"Pig tail?" Techno translated, giving her a curious look.

Hannah shrugged. "Hey, I didn't make it up. You coming in? I really am just here to drop off the book."

He grimaced. "Nah, all that yellow n red hurts my eyes. It looks like the inside of a McDonald's

happy meal in there."

Hannah laughed, waving him off. "I'll be right back, then." The portrait slammed shut behind her.

"I'm glad you at least have the decency not to enter where you don't belong," The Fat Lady huffed, swirling the drink in her goblet around.

"Uh... that's me. Decent as always." Techno didn't really enjoy making conversation with the various portrait inhabitants of the castle, but he didn't want to be rude, especially to the lady who guarded what could possibly be a Gryffindor dueling hideout.

"I should have known, of course, since you're friends with Miss Rose. Some of the *younger* students seem to struggle with the concept of a '*Gryffindor* Common Room,'" she said bitterly.

Yeah, it didn't take a Ravenclaw to figure out who *that* comment was aimed at. "Don't worry, ma'am, I'm about as far away from bein like Tommy as humanly possible. And if that ever changes, I made a pact to get the life hexed outta me."

"Hmph, I see his reputation precedes him." She turned her nose up, sniffing, "I've had a good number of troublemakers behind my portrait over the years, but he is quite *something*. Him *and* his little Hufflepuff friend."

That was definitely one way to describe them.

The portrait swung open again and Hannah stepped outside. She nodded her head towards the stairs ahead of them before waving goodbye over her shoulder at the Fat Lady.

"Thank you!"

"Of course, dear!" The Lady waved back, smiling at her.

"Looks like she's a fan of yours," Techno remarked as they climbed up the staircase.

"It pays to be nice to the paintings." She said, holding her arm out as they reached a flat surface before a turn in the staircase, "Speaking of."

"Heya, Hannah." A tall, familiar looking red-headed figure leaned forward in his painting, a wide grin on his face and a mischievous glint in his eyes. "Who's that?"

"Technoblade, he's the new guy," she said, nodding her head in Techno's direction.

The man gave him a once over before frowning. "Boo, he's not even a Gryffindor!"

"Come on, Fred—"

"House traitor, Hannah! You're a house traitor!" The man wailed theatrically, draping himself against the frame in an overly dramatic manner.

Techno narrowed his eyes at the painting, thinking. Something about the man was incredibly familiar to him, but he couldn't pinpoint exactly why that was.

"Hey, Hannah, what'd you say this guy's name was?" he whispered to her as the painting droned on and on about Hannah's betrayal.

"Fred. Fred Weasley."

Techno nodded in understanding. *That's* why he was familiar.

"Wow, Hannah, you didn't tell me we'd be meeting with *The* Fred Weasley." Techno said loudly, cutting into the man's tangent, "Honestly, I'm in awe. I didn't even know we had a paintin of the guy here."

The eyes of the painting crinkled in amusement as he leaned towards Techno. "Ah, the classic ego-stroking tactic! Never thought I'd have it used on *me*! Go on then, you gonna tell me how I died a hero and SAVED the wizarding world?" He inspected his nails casually, leaning against the picture frame.

"Psh, *nah*." Techno snorted, waving him off, "Anyone can die in a war, my dad did that, yer not special."

Fred's mouth twisted into an 'o' shape and Hannah cringed.

"I was just gonna thank you for that joke shop y'opened up before you kicked it. See, my friend's got this neighbor that's just the worst kinda pain on his *best* days. Yer stuff helped me take care of him a coupl'a times," Techno said, smiling at the thought.

"Yeah? How?" Fred asked, intrigued.

"Well, that Missin' Body Mixture worked nice enough to make him think I lost my head and that my friend was the rest of me walkin around without one. That's still a personal favorite of mine."

"HAH!" The man threw his head back, "That's brilliant! Alright, Hannah, this kid's good in my book. He's got a little bit'a Gryffindor in him after all!"

The painting swung to the side, revealing a secret opening behind it.

"Yeah, I think so too." Hannah smiled wide, pulling Techno in through the entrance.

"You owe me more stories if you make it out alive, new boy!" Fred called after them, before swinging shut and sealing them in with a laugh.

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"Sagittae!"

"Diffindo!"

The sound of spells being thrown echoed around the room as Techno stepped into it. Hardly anyone paid any attention to him or Hannah, too engaged as they were in spectating the duel in front of them.

"You got it, Harvey!" Someone shouted from the audience as an arrow went flying towards one of the duelists and was immediately slashed in half.

"Sagittae Maxima!" the other duelist cast, and Techno instantly recognized him as Nestorio.

"Sagittae Maxima?" he asked, leaning towards Hannah. He'd never heard that one before, and that meant it wasn't in any of the known spellbooks. He *wouldn't* have missed a spell like that.

Hannah winced, pulling her wand out and taking a step in front of Techno. "Nestor's been trying to modify the wand arrow spell since last year," she explained, watching nervously as countless, bright, spike shaped lights appeared around the boy. "The thing is, it's—"

The lights exploded outwards, scattering sharp arrows in every direction.

"*Protego!*" Hannah yelled, along with several other audience members, shielding the two of them from the onslaught.

The sound of whizzing projectiles, hard thunks, and panicked shouts filled the room for a tense minute before the attack finally subsided and they all sighed in relief.

"Oh! You actually managed to hold one this time!" Nestorio's opponent cried as his protection charm wore off, pointing at one hovering arrow in front of him before it clattered to the floor and disappeared, "For like a second. But STILL!"

"That's the third time I've ever done that!" he responded excitedly, staring in awe at the place where the arrow had stood. "Dude!"

"I think they're getting stronger, too," someone else said from the crowd, pointing to a quickly fizzling out protection charm that had the head of an arrow piercing through it.

"That's...that's insane. You guys're *modifying* spells here?" Techno asked incredulously.

Hannah smiled, pleased. "Not all of us, but most of us have at least *tried*."

"Yo, Technooo!" a voice called right up ahead of them before an arm was abruptly slung over the Ravenclaw's shoulder.

"Calvin," Techno muttered in greeting.

"Thanks for bringin him over, Hannah, I think Fruit said you owed him a rematch from last time." Calvin nodded his head towards a short guy who at a first glance looked almost exactly like Dream. Poor kid.

"Oh, he's *on*." Hannah narrowed her eyes at the boy, brandishing her wand as she headed over to him.

"So, you finally made it to C.U.H.M. headquarters!" Calvin said proudly.

"*Pardon?*" Techno grimaced, eyeing the boy beside him with a disturbed look.

"Yeah! C-U-H-M, Competitive Ultra Hardcore Magic! *Duh*." He rolled his eyes, failing to suppress a smirk.

"Of course."

"Well, you've seen it all, so whaddaya think of the place?" Calvin asked, gesturing broadly to the training room.

Now that he wasn't engaged in watching an ongoing fight, Techno was able to take in the full expanse of the Gryffindor dueling place. There were tables pressed up against the wall with various potions and ingredients strewn over them. Mats were lined along the floors and around the dueling platform, presumably to catch any flying students from hitting the ground too hard. There were a couple of training dummies, too, though they seemed to have been abandoned long ago in favor of

real life dueling partners.

There even seemed to be a lounge of sorts, with comfy chairs, spare Gryffindor robes hanging on racks, and stray homework books that definitely weren't getting the attention they needed in this place.

It was perfect.

"It's aight," Techno shrugged.

"Yeah, *yeah*, tell that to y'jaw all the way down there." Calvin nudged him good naturedly, pointing to the floor. "But seriously, this place hasn't seen a newbie in two years, and it's *never* seen someone who wasn't a Gryffindor. We've been keepin this place a secret since we started this thing, cuz we're not here to play around. You better prove to us we didn't make a mistake in trusting you."

Techno nodded firmly. "I will."

"Good." He replied, before raising his wand with an evil grin. "Now let's duel."

"What, now?" Techno stammered, pulling his own wand out frantically.

"Yup! I told everyone here you were something else, and they alllll wanna have a go and judge you for themselves!" he declared cheerfully, as if he *didn't* just tell Techno that he was basically facing certain death.

Well, according to Wil, facing death was basically in the new prefect job description. "Alright, I'm ready." He steeled his nerves, setting his sights ahead of him. "Let's duel."

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Techno had *not*, in fact, been ready. Not even remotely. Opponent after opponent came up against him, all with wildly different fighting tactics and angles. He wasn't even sure if their dueling styles were genuine or if they were just doing a bunch of fancy stuff to throw him off.

By the end of it all, he felt like he'd been hit by a semi truck. Followed by a full truck. Followed by a plane. Followed by a *nuke*. He was battered and bruised, and despite that... he'd never felt better. The way these people fought was nothing like he'd ever seen before. No textbook in the world could compare to the real life experience of getting your brains jinxed out of your nostrils or whatever the hell kinda torture he'd been subjected to. He honestly wasn't sure what spells had been cast against him; they were all melding together into one big mega 'Fuck You' spell in his mind.

"You good, buddy?" two people asked him at the same time. Or, no, actually it was one guy, Techno was just seeing double.

"*Mm. Nevrbetr*," Techno slurred before promptly collapsing into him.

"OH-kay, we don't have the resources to dispose of a corpse. Let's go lay you down somewhere."

Somehow, the guy managed to drag Techno's unhelpful burden of a body across the entire training

room, depositing him on a pleasantly comfortable piece of furniture. Though by this point he'd gotten so used to the feeling of his back hitting the mats with maximum impact that a brick slab would probably feel comfortable enough.

"Okay, let's see what we can do about this." The guy rubbed his hands together in preparation, "Merlin, I don't even know where to start— whatever, *Episkey!*"

A warmth traveled across Techno's head, trailing over the cuts on his lip, to the bruises on the side of his head, to the pain in the back of his eyes from all the bright flashing lights he had in his face.

"*Hrgh*," he groaned helpfully as the healing spell started to mend his injuries.

"Yeah, I agree," his savior replied. "We're probably gonna need to help out on the rest of you, too. No hospital wing visits for duel club injuries."

That made sense, Techno supposed.

"*Reparifors!*"

The new spell started to take effect in tandem with the old, arcing across his entire body this time in a way that made him feel like his muscles were being wrung out like old rags. And then like they were being scrubbed from the inside.

"Yeesh! You look like *ass*, dude," Calvin remarked, materializing beside the other guy as Techno finally felt parts of his limbs cease their rebellion against him.

"He needs a Wiggeweld potion."

"Psh, way ahead of you, Noah," Cal said, shaking a red tinted bottle up in front of him.

Techno's savior, Noah, snatched the bottle from his hand, popping the cap off and sniffing it before giving an approving nod. "Alright, mouth open, Technoblade."

"*Ghkk*."

The sound was meant to be one of agreement and compliance, but it seemed like his mouth was still struggling to catch up with the healing spells.

"How many times did he get *Langlock* ed?" Calvin grimaced, looking down at him in concern.

"I dunno. A lot?"

The answer was thirteen, but who was counting?

"Try the Unsticking Charm, maybe?"

"Hm," Noah pointed his wand at Techno's face. "*Reglutino!*"

Almost immediately his tongue stopped feeling like a foreign object, separating from its uncomfortable position on the roof of his mouth.

"*Thanks*," he croaked, sitting up slowly.

"There he is! Here, drink this," Calvin exclaimed, grabbing the potion out of his friend's hand before shoving it at Techno's mouth so hard that his teeth clanked against the glass rim.

"Urgh." That wasn't fun, but he didn't even have the energy to insult the guy.

"My bad."

Techno frowned at him and knocked the liquid back. Instantly, the familiar taste of the healing potion spread across his tongue. It'd been the primary medicine used for him back in year one when he'd been attacked with the Draught of Living Death. And just as it had back then, the potion felt like a million volts of electricity coursing through his system, rudely jolting him out of his sluggishness.

"Thanks." He handed the potion back to Noah.

The boy waved him off. "Anytime. I'm gonna go figure out how to schedule the next meeting with this whole Hog's Head party in the way. Cal, you can babysit."

"Yessir," he saluted before plopping down in a chair next to Techno and propping his legs up. "Sooo, didja have fun?"

"Time of my life," he deadpanned, looking over his shoulder at the retreating figure. "Who was that guy? I don't remember him beating me up."

"Yeah, he was *gonna*, but then he felt bad." Calvin snickered, "That's Noah, he's actually the one who helped us start this club. He's good at all the..." he paused and gestured vaguely with his hands, "event organizing business."

"Mm." Techno nodded.

"So, you gonna come back next time?" Calvin asked, arching his eyebrows.

"Are you kiddin? Y'think I'm just gonna let myself get demolished by everyone and *not* come back?"

The boy laughed, "You're not letting that slide, huh? Good, you actually weren't even that terrible, you just need more hands-on practice. I made the right choice in bringing you here."

Techno rolled his eyes, opening his mouth to refute the idea that he hadn't done badly before closing it. "Hm. Calvin, why *did* you bring me here? I mean, I probably woulda cried and begged and groveled until y'did, so I'm glad that didn't hafta happen but... why?"

The boy stared at him in silence, pondering his answer before asking a question of his own. "Techno, how did you get here?"

"Heh? I followed Hannah—"

"No, not *here* here, I meant, like, the UK. How'd your family end up here? You're American."

Yeah, Tommy made sure to remind him of *that* every time he saw him. "My mom n' I went to live in California after my dad died in the war, but when she saw I had magic we moved back."

"Why?"

Techno gave him a weird look. "Because she's got no magic, and y'can't go to magic school in America without magic parents." He paused, giving the boy a once over. "Yer American, you should know that."

"Exactly, I *do* know that." He took his feet down, leaning closer to Techno. "Come on, man, you're

smart. Didn't you notice that everyone in this club is American? Hell, didn't you notice just how many Americans there *are* in this school? That should be weird! This school's an entire continent away from the States! There shouldn't be that many of us here!"

"...Huh." Techno'd never really thought about the logistics of Hogwarts's diverse student population, but now that Calvin mentioned it, it really *was* kinda weird.

"Lemme spell it out for you, Techno. Outside of me and Noah, every single person in this room comes from No-Maj's in one way or another. All these guys? They woulda *never* been allowed to learn magic in America. They'd've been left to lead a life without any of it! The government woulda even had their *memories* wiped if it got to that! You get what I'm saying?"

He nodded, but Calvin continued anyway.

"They all came here because they had no choice. D'you know how hard people are fighting for No-Maj-born rights in the States? It's insane! They're all talking and talking and bringing up examples from across the globe and nothing happens, nobody's budging." Calvin gritted his teeth before huffing, "And then they come here and find out that 'muggle-borns' are still discriminated against. How's that fair?! You leave America because you have no rights, you come here and you still barely have any rights, and all people do is talk about it and say how sad and awful it is and nothing happens. *You* know that more than anyone, right?"

Techno balled his fists. He *did* know. How many interviews had his mom gone through, how many speeches had she given, how many essays had she written, and what did she even have to show for it? She pissed off the ministry, a dangerous chunk of people hated her, and the press took every opportunity to take stabs at her intelligence.

"Yeah."

Calvin nodded firmly. "We all saw it coming; I mean, we have a whole living example of what a world without No-Maj rights looks like!. Talk is important, sure, but we knew that we'd never be able to talk our way into fixing things in America. And we're not gonna be able to talk our way into fixing things here, either. These guys knew from the second they got their magic that they'd have to *fight* to keep it, and with all the shit going down in the ministry, we're just being proven right!" He placed a hand on Techno's shoulder. " *That's* why I brought you here."

Techno stared at him, pondering the words before replying, "Because I'm American."

Calvin cracked a smile, slapping him on the back good naturedly. "Yup! You nailed it!"

Techno grinned, shaking the hand off of him.

"But seriously, pal. You're here because you're one of us. You're a *fighter*, Technoblade. We're gonna help turn you into a real one."

~~~~~

"Hey, ye big dumb gobshite! Get dressed!"

Dream looked up from his comfortable position on a couch in the Slytherin common room and met

Minx's determined stare.

"What? Why? I'm studying," he answered, pointedly holding up the Arithmancy textbook in his hands.

Minx huffed. "No, yer not. Get up, we're going to the party."

Ah. So *that's* what this was about.

"No. I told you, I'm not going to that," he said firmly.

Apparently, this answer was not sufficient for Minx, as the girl proceeded to pick up a nearby green throw pillow and toss it at Dream's head. To his credit, Dream dodged the projectile flawlessly.

"Weak," he remarked, turning his attention back to his textbook. "Not going."

He waited for the ensuing outburst, for the insults and frustrated protests. When none came, he slowly looked back up and found Minx staring at him pensively.

"I *really* think ye should go," she insisted.

Dream let out an exasperated sigh and put his book down on the coffee table. "Minx, why the fuck would I go to George's party? He *hates* me," he spat out bitterly.

Minx took a seat beside him on the couch and folded her hands on her lap. "Ye can't really say that until ye talk to him."

"He doesn't want to talk to me."

"No, he *didn't* want to talk to you. We 'ave no idea what he's feelin now."

Dream pursed his lips, unconvinced. He still didn't want to go.

"Come on, Selwyn," Minx urged, "you might get an opportunity to finally talk to him again. An' even if ye don't, they've got firewhisky! It'll be fun!"

"And what if it's not fun? What if I'm miserable?" Dream asked.

"Then we fuckin' come back here and play Explodin' Snap in the common room or something to get yer mind off it. Niki and Puffy are comin' too, so it's not like yer gonna be *alone*. We're not sendin ye off to war, Dreamie."

"Don't call me that." Grumbled Dream.

The thought of Niki and Puffy by his side certainly made the idea of going more tolerable, but he remained unsure. Dream hummed as he ran over his options in his head. No, the thought of having to come face-to-face with all his former Ravenclaw friends at the party didn't sound fun, but he wouldn't *have* to talk to anyone. He could just go, scope the place out, have some firewhisky, and head back to his dorm room. His new friends all knew what a sensitive topic the whole George situation was for him; they wouldn't force him to step out of his comfort zone if he absolutely didn't want to.

So, after a moment of contemplation, Dream stood from the couch and headed back to his room to change. He wasn't all that surprised to see that none of his roommates, not even GB80, were around. They had all left earlier in the evening and were probably drowning in firewhiskey by now.

He donned a pair of loose muggle jeans, a plain black t-shirt, and a dark green hoodie before meeting Minx outside the common room and heading upstairs to where Niki and Puffy were already waiting for them.

With his new friends by his side, the party suddenly didn't seem so daunting. Maybe it would be fun after all.

~~~~~

They heard the party long before they actually saw it.

When Sapnap promised a rager, he hadn't been kidding. Even though Dream and the girls had taken the secret passage through the Room of Requirement by the Gryffindor's instruction, the intense sounds of thumping bass and shouting teenagers ricocheted around the tunnel like an echochamber.

"They didn't think to use any noise-canceling charms?" Puffy wondered, raising her voice so she could be heard above the ruckus.

"That's not very smart," Niki observed. "Surely they'll get in trouble. What if a prefect heard them?"

Minx chuckled and threw an arm around the younger girl. "Oh, Niki, ye sweet summer child. Every single prefect is already *at* the party."

Though it was dark outside, Dream swore he saw the German girl blush and lean into Minx's touch before replying. "Oh..."

They soon reached the end of the passage and the four clambered out into the backroom of the pub. The owner, Aberforth, wasn't there so they followed the sound of the booming base to the main portion of the pub. As they walked together down the creaking staircase, the immense crowd came into their view, and Dream marveled at the sheer number of people who seemed to be crammed into the space.

"CAN WE ALL HOLD HANDS OR SOMETHING?" Puffy screamed as they entered the throng, clinging to Minx's robe so as not to get lost.

"YEAH, THA'S A GOOD IDEA! NIKI, GRAB MY HAND!" Minx yelled back, grabbing the blonde girl's hand and pulling her closer.

Just then, a glass bottle appeared in front of Dream, hovering just two inches from his face. The label read *Ogden's Old Firewhisky*.

"Heya, Dreamie! Glad you could make it!" announced a voice above his head.

He looked up and locked eyes with a clearly tipsy Sapnap, who was flying an old broom above the rest of the partygoers and pointing his wand at the levitating bottle. "C'mon, don't be shy, take it! We bought a shit ton!"

Dream's fingers curled around the bottle and Sapnap broke the levitation spell before zooming off

to provide alcohol to some other poor unsuspecting teenagers. By the time Dream turned around to offer a sip of the fiery beverage to one of the girls, he discovered they had all dissolved into the density of the crowd.

*Well, fuck.*

~~~~~

George was convinced Sapnap was trying to kill him.

“LET’S GO!!! GIVE IT UP FOR OUR BIRTHDAY BOY!” he roared into the crowd.

His position on his broom combined with the amplifying charm he’d used on his voice gave him an authoritative air. So when Sapnap tried to haul George onto the broom with him, George unhappily settled for climbing onto one of the inn’s shabby tables instead, opting for the safer option.

“Alright, alright, folks!” the Gryffindor continued, hovering several feet above everyone’s heads, “we’re about to take this party to the next level, and George here is gonna lead the way!”

George shuffled nervously. Whatever his younger friend was up to, it did not sound good.

“Skeppy!” Sapnap called out, “Bring out the keg!”

The crowd parted like the Red Sea, making way for Skeppy and his Gryffindor friend Quackity to come through with a giant barrel of ale. Hopefully it was ale, George couldn’t be sure.

“And now, ladies and gentlepeople, George is gonna do a keg stand!”

“Sapnap!” George yelled, “I don’t want to do this!”

“WHAT?” the Gryffindor yelled back, “OF COURSE YOU CAN DO THIS! HERE, I’LL HOLD YOUR LEGS!”

“No! I am *not* doing this!”

“OHHH, YOU WANT ME TO GO FIRST? OKAY!”

Before George could say otherwise, Sapnap hopped his broom and propelled himself into a handstand with practiced precision. Quackity and Skeppy hurriedly grabbed a leg each while Sapnap shoved the keg nozzle into his mouth and began to chug.

The crowd went wild. “SAP-NAP! SAP-NAP! SAP-NAP!” they began to chant in unison.

If George weren’t already so stressed out by the whole party situation, he would have been impressed and highly amused. But he was in fact, very stressed and simply wanted to leave the hellhole of a stuffy inn.

He jumped in surprise when he felt a tug on the sleeve of his jumper, quickly relaxing when he saw that it was just Techno.

The prefect jerked his head towards the crowd. “GET OUT WHILE Y’CAN!” he urged. “GO,

BEFORE THE KID'S DONE DRINKIN'!"

George didn't have to be told twice. Grateful to his roommate for rescuing him, he ducked into the crowd and was instantly absorbed into the mass of bodies.

"Hey George! Happy birthday, you muffin!" Bad said as George passed him. The Hufflepuff prefect only looked a *tad* uncomfortable with the proceedings. "This party is really loud! And the fruit punch must be really good, because people are drinking so much of it!"

George merely nodded and continued making his way towards the exit. It wasn't like he could say much over the noise, anyway. Just when he thought he was finally close to getting out of the building, however, he tripped over a discarded bottle and barrelled head-first into somebody.

"Oh, sorry, I—"

"George?"

In that moment, even though the noise all around him was deafening and the presence of so many people breathing the same air was suffocating, the universe was put on pause. The music stopped, or maybe it just faded into the background, but all he could focus on, all that existed was George and the boy — tall, blond, devastatingly familiar.

Dream.

His face was flushed from the heat; his forehead shiny with perspiration. A bead of sweat was slowly sliding down the Slytherin's jaw and George traced its movements with his eyes, caught in a trance. When a look of concern overtook the Slytherin's face and caused his eyebrows to scrunch up in concern, George had to resist the urge to reach out and smooth them over with his fingers. He shook his head at the thought.

Maybe the single bottle of firewhisky he'd reluctantly consumed was getting to him.

"Hey— hey, you okay?" Dream asked, voice just barely audible above the chaos.

George nodded dumbly, though somewhere in the back of his head he recognized that he was starting to get uncomfortably hot and lightheaded. Dream seemed to pick up on George's discomfort — how did he read him so well? — and grabbed George's hand in his. George couldn't stop himself from staring at the veins that traveled up the blond's knuckles as Dream dragged him away from the crowd.

He led the both of them outside, dropping his hand as soon as the cool November air hit their cheeks. George mourned the loss of contact until he remembered whose hand he'd just been holding and why he'd been so surprised to see him in the first place. He hadn't spoken to Dream in months.

Outside, standing under the light of the magically lit Hogsmeade street lamps, Dream suddenly looked nervous. He was no longer meeting George's eyes, instead staring resolutely at his own shoes.

"Dream—?"

"This doesn't seem like the kind of thing you'd want for your birthday," he spoke quickly, glancing up from his shoes briefly to look at George before his eyes darted away once more.

George paused. "No, it definitely isn't," he agreed. "Sapnap planned it."

“No shit,” Dream snorted. A beat. Then, “You seemed off back there.”

“Oh, yeah. Thanks for, erm...”

“Oh yeah, um, sure. No problem.”

The ensuing silence was thick, awkward, and excruciating. George half-wished that Dream would talk and half-wished that the ground would swallow the both of them whole.

Dream sucked in a breath. George waited, wondering how to proceed.

“So, we need to talk,” the blond began, turning to face George and pinning him with that piercing green gaze. “But I think you know that.”

George nodded. Dream continued, “I...Merlin, George, I really fucking miss you. You’re — well, you *were* my best friend, and these past few months have just sucked without you. But...” Here he hesitated.

“But?”

“But I’m also pretty mad at you. I—” Dream’s voice shook with a choked half sob, and George abruptly realized that the boy was trying to hold back tears.

“Dream—”

“No, no wait, let me finish. I...you just *left* me. And I get that you were mad or whatever, believe me, I was mad at my shitty parents too, but I was— I still am in an impossible position, reeling from all the shit my dad was throwing at me, and instead of trying to understand me, you just... left.”

George swallowed as he listened. He wanted to interrupt, to defend himself, but he sensed that Dream needed to get these things off his chest.

“And then that made *me* feel like the shittiest person on the planet, because there I was, trying to do the right thing by my *baby sister*, and my best friend in the whole world was so disgusted by my actions that he couldn’t even bear to speak to me. You...you broke my heart, George.”

George winced. Put like that, he sounded like a right dick. But they both knew things weren’t that simple.

“I’m sorry,” George finally replied, holding Dream’s gaze. “I know I might have gone about things wrong, but I was really hurt as well. I felt like my best friend was telling me that being non-magical was some sort of curse that needed curing, and I couldn’t understand why you would knowingly continue associating with people who saw my own *family* as less valuable because of how they were born.”

Dream swallowed. “That’s...fair. But your family is innocent. Mine, on the other hand...” he paused and chuckled humorlessly. “My dad sucks. But he’s my dad. And I don’t *like* him, not at all, but I still love him. I just, I don’t know, I’m sorting through so much shit in my head, and if it weren’t for Minx helping me process it all, I don’t know what the fuck I would have done.”

George’s heart panged at the mention of the Slytherin girl. Dream spoke her name with such gratitude, such respect, and George couldn’t fault him for it. She was there for him when George wasn’t.

"I was so angry," George spoke. "I *wanted* to be there for you, but I knew I couldn't do it while you were still working for your father and his bloody human experimentation camp."

"Well, I don't work for him anymore." Dream sighed, "I'm not even welcome in his fucking house."

George's eyebrows shot up into his hair. "You're not?"

"Not since I basically told him I don't respect him. He didn't take it too well." Dream turned his head and pointed to a faint white line cutting across his cheek. "See this shit? Dad fucking decked me."

"That...that's *child abuse!* Dream!" George spluttered. "He *cut* you?"

"Relax, it's not too bad. Didn't hurt all that much. I could have had it healed, but I figured I'd let it scar so I could always look in the mirror and remember what an asshole he is. Also cause I look pretty badass if you ask me."

At that moment, George realized that he was staring right at the very thing he'd been desperate to see ever since the whole W.A.P. thing began: evidence that Dream wasn't like his family. Seeing his former best friend hunched over in the moonlight, bearing the scars of his father's wrath, there was no question in George's mind that something in the Slytherin had fundamentally shifted. Now when Dream spoke of the people who raised him, his voice was no longer timid, laced with uncertainty. Now it was unwavering.

Dream had a heart of gold and the conviction to match it. He wasn't some stuck-up pureblood bigot, no matter how many times Technoblade had warned George otherwise. He was genuinely a good person.

He was Dream. George's Dream.

"For what it's worth...I miss you too," George offered, breaking the silence.

Dream suddenly looked up, and the expression on his face was...hopeful? Desperate? The flicker of emotion was brief, but George nonetheless caught it and filed it away for later analysis.

"George, I... there's something else..." Dream trailed off, looking around as though he were searching for the right words to say. George waited with bated breath.

A crash sounded from nearby. And the tension that was building with whatever Dream was trying to say popped as soon as Sapnap stumbled out of the inn and directly into Dream's arms. The blond staggered under the fourth-year's weight.

"Dream! George! I'm s w s o happy t' see you guys talkin!" the Gryffindor slurred happily. His face was flushed; George wrinkled his nose at the pungent scent of spirits that lingered in the air after he spoke.

"Yeah, dude, good to see you," Dream replied, smiling slightly. George couldn't remember the last time he'd seen the two spend time with one another.

"I miss'd you soooooo much," Sapnap drawled, clinging to Dream like a lifeline. "Please don't fight anymore, it frickin SUCKS! You, me, an' George are, like..." he paused, struggling to find the right words, "we're like a *team*, maaaaan!"

Dream's eyes flickered up to George's. They shared a look before the blond answered, "Oh yeah?"

“Yeah! Weeee’re a fuckin *dream team*, bro!”

“If we’re a dream team, does that mean I’m the leader? Because Dream’s literally my name.”

George snorted. Sapnap looked at Dream like the boy was insane. “You’re not th’leader,” he asserted. “You don’ ‘ave the *balls*.”

“Hmm,” Dream hummed. “Whaddya say we get you back to the Gryffindor common room, huh? You look like you’ve had enough partying.”

Sapnap groaned. “Noooooooo! More party! Guyyyyyssss.”

“He’s going to be absolutely wrecked tomorrow,” George noted.

“Yeah. Should we try and drag him back to the castle, or...?”

As they stood outside the Hog’s Head in the chilly November air debating what to do about their plastered friend, George felt a weight lift off his shoulders. He and Dream were finally on the same page again.

They were finally on the same team.

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"Good afternoon, students!" Aurora said cheerily as she stepped into the classroom. "Please turn your pages to the section on *Endermen*, as indicated by the table of contents." She strolled over to George's desk, pointing at a certain section in his book.

The boy looked up at her with a sour expression. "*Thanks*."

"Of course! I'm always happy to assist, so don't be shy to ask." She hummed, meandering back over to the front of the class.

George turned to look at Dream, giving him a pointed stare. Aurora had always been a sore subject between them, even before their falling out, but no matter how much the Ravenclaw insisted that she had some kind of weird hang-up over him being a muggle-born, Dream never saw any issue with the woman’s actions.

Well, at least until now.

He didn't think Aurora was *racist* or anything like that, but looking at her actions now, he realized she was a little... insensitive when it came to interacting with muggle-born students.

It'd made sense to him before, all the extra help she seemed eager to lend to George, but now it just... didn't. She obviously didn't mean anything bad by it, but she clearly didn't know better. She was just like how Dream used to be, someone who thought they were doing things right when really they were just going about life all wrong.

He *still* wasn't totally sure what the 'right way' of going about things was, but maybe he could talk to her about it and they'd learn together. Even when the influence of Dream's parents had been at its strongest, Aurora was there to help guide him, to show him that muggle-borns deserved respect and tolerance just as much as any other wizard. Now he could return the favor.

"Alright, who can read the first entry out loud for us?" Aurora asked, snapping Dream out of his thoughts and making him flip frantically through his textbook to find the correct section.

"Page 180," George whispered. Dream smiled gratefully towards him.

*Page 180, page 180, page 180, page—* Dream froze. The page settled in front of him, revealing a whole jumbled mess of words and arrows and diagrams, but the only thing he noticed was a bright pair of eyes. Not green or red like they were in his nightmares, but undeniably familiar, nonetheless.

Someone in the classroom had started reading out the material, but Dream could hardly hear the person's voice. He felt numb all over. The printed image of a lanky, black creature on the page before him, no matter how hard he tried, would not stop looking like a scared little boy.

*Alone and the lights are out and he doesn't even remember his own name and he's only eleven fucking years old—*

"Very good!" Aurora said loudly, and when Dream glanced up he noticed her looking right at him. "Now, I'd like to veer a *little bit* off the lesson plan to talk about something related to these creatures! By a show of hands, who here has apparated before? Either by house elf, relative, or even by your own merit when you'd first developed your magic."

Most of the class raised their hands, and after processing her words for a moment, Dream did too.

"George, *you've* apparated before?" Aurora asked curiously. "Do you know what apparating means?"

"Yes, of course I know what it means. I apparated when my magic started developing. It's like teleporting." George huffed, lowering his hand.

"Well, that's certainly one way to explain it!" She smiled at him. "Though apparition is very advanced magic, George, so perhaps what you experienced when you were younger was something different."

"It *was*—" George turned to Dream for confirmation, but paused as he noticed the haunted look on his face, "wh... whatever."

"Alright then! As we all know, apparition takes a lot of concentration and magical potential, but endermen appear to use it as their primary form of movement! They can do so frequently across long distances without tiring, which means that their species hold an incredible amount of magic!" The professor looked excited as she said this. "This discovery in regards to enderman magic is what spurred an entire branch of research in the Wizarding Advancement Project."

Dream's heart dropped and his hands balled into fists, gripping the sides of his desk tightly. *Please don't start talking about him. Please*, he mentally begged.

"They theorized that if the blood of an endermen were to be given to a squib, it could potentially imbue them with similar magical capabilities! Those were the contents of the study that was published earlier this year! Isn't that exciting, students?"

No. It wasn't. Not even remotely.

"Professor —" Techno began through gritted teeth.

"Ah ah! Ten points from Ravenclaw for speaking out of turn." Aurora tsked in disapproval,



"Really, Mr. Technoblade, you should know better than to talk before raising your hand."

Techno glared and raised his hand. Aurora ignored him.

"Yes, Ms. Minx!" She said, pointing instead at the Slytherin girl who had her hand up too.

"Yeah, if I remember correctly, *professor*, that fuc— that study was a *failure*." She sneered, leaving an emphasis on the word, "So as per usual the WAP was *wrong* and that shi— the whole thing was a complete waste of time n' money."

"When it comes to research there is no such thing as wasted time! It doesn't matter if something is *wrong* because there is always something to be learned from it." Aurora corrected her with a strained smile, "And besides, the experiments *hadn't* failed! The willing subjects who'd volunteered themselves for the test may not have obtained magic like you and I, but they still gained some of the traits displayed by endermen, such as apparition."

*Willing. Volunteered.* She had no idea what the truth really was. She had no clue that they were scared children who were caged in cells and hardly saw the light of day.

"Right, like that helps 'em out." Minx scoffed, "'Ooh look at me I can't do magic but at least I can pop up at random places, where's my Hogwarts letter?!'"

"Ms. Minx, please, these individuals are finally getting to experience a small sliver of what they've always dreamed of having. A privilege with which you were *born*," Aurora said, furrowing her brows.

"Mhm, and where are those fu— *individuals* now?" she asked, folding her arms and giving her professor an unimpressed look.

*Dead. They're dead. They were thrown away like trash.*

Aurora sighed, "Well, when the experiments hadn't yielded the desired results and the subjects wished to withdraw, they'd ceased testing immediately. The volunteers have been released back to their homes where they are frequently updated on the progress being made towards curing their affliction."

*No. No, they weren't. That's a LIE.*

Dream stood up abruptly, his hands slamming down on the table, turning every head in the room towards him.

"Dream." Aurora said cautiously, "Are you alright?"

"No." Dream choked out, his entire body shaking, "No, you— what you're saying isn't true. That's *not* what happened to them."

"Pardon?"

"You— they're lying to you!" Dream yelled, feeling his heart pounding hard in his chest.

He wasn't supposed to reveal any of this, and if his father ever found out there's no telling what would happen. But that didn't matter to him anymore, nothing did. He'd failed Ranboo before; he could have *saved him*, but he didn't. The least he could do now was make sure people knew *exactly* what had been done to him and why he was gone.

"They— they *weren't* willing test subjects, they were CHILDREN. They were kids who— who were lied to, and were scared, and were so used to being experimented on that they didn't even fight back!" Dream cried, remembering the way Ranboo had been so sure that Dream was just another scientist coming to inject him, "And they *didn't* get to go home, they— they never got to see their families ever again, they probably didn't even remember them—" his breath hitched, but he couldn't pause to cry. He *had* to finish, he had to tell them the truth.

"Dream, let's take a step outside. You're clearly not feeling well," Aurora said gently, walking up to him and putting a hand against his back as she guided him towards the door.

"N-no, I'm fine, I just need to—!"

"*Dream.*" She said firmly, "You sound entirely delirious. *Children* being experimented on? Do you honestly think the ministry would approve something like that? It sounds like you've come down with some sort of illness. I'm taking you to the Hospital Wing immediately. I'd never forgive myself if you'd gotten hurt under my supervision." She turned back to the classroom, "Everyone, please continue reading the section on endermen until I return. We will review the material then."

With that, she escorted him out of the classroom briskly and shut the door behind her.

"Aurora, please, you— you have to listen to me, I saw it with my own eyes! Those kids, they— they didn't get to go home..." His vision blurred, the word *terminated* flashing in his mind. "They were—"

"Dream, stop." Aurora cut in, her forehead wrinkling in concern, "I will not allow you to continue indulging in these delusions. It isn't healthy!"

"But— but they're *not* delusions!" he insisted, staring at her with pleading eyes. *You have to believe me.*

The woman sighed, a heavy disappointed sound. "It pains me to hear you say these things, you understand?" She met Dream's gaze and he was almost shocked to see the sadness in her look. "I— I never told anyone this, but I am a *member* of the Wizarding Advancement Project. The subject of squibness is very dear to me, even more so now that your poor sister has become afflicted with the disease. The endermen experiments were *my* idea."

Dream felt his head spin. "Wh— what?" He asked. His voice sounded hollow.

"I always felt that perhaps magical creatures could hold the cure we are searching for. I was the one who led the testing and procedures for the entire period that the experiment was active. All executive decisions, including the *release* of our participants were approved by me. I'd made *sure* that it was all done as humanely as possible. I put the utmost care into the comfort of my volunteers. So to hear you say such things about my work..." She sniffed, turning away from him, "It— it is *extremely* hurtful."

Dream felt like his tongue weighed a billion pounds. What could he even say in response to that?

It couldn't be true, what she was saying. He knew what he'd seen; the countless sleepless nights he had weren't the result of *nothing*. Ranboo wasn't *nothing*. He was real, he was a person— a little boy, and he had suffered. That wasn't something that Dream's mind had *made up*. So then why did Aurora sound so sure of herself?

"I—"

"No, there's no need to apologize, Dream. *I* am sorry for having such an emotional response

towards something you could hardly control." She straightened herself up, holding onto Dream's arm and giving it a reassuring squeeze as they kept walking towards the Hospital Wing. "Whatever it was that you're so certain you saw, it must've been a *very* convincing figment of your imagination. I can't even begin to visualize how frightening that must be."

No, no, she had it all wrong. The W.A.P. must've been *lying* to her about her research, making her think her subjects were willing participants that got sent home at the end of the day when really they were the furthest thing from that.

"You... your work—"

"Was conducted in a safe and ethical manner," she finished for him. "I *personally* came to check on the volunteers from time to time and documented their symptoms following injections. I don't know what you believe you saw, but I can assure you it is not how things truly are."

It couldn't be. It wasn't possible.

"I would never let any harm come to another person, least of all a *child*. You know that, don't you?" she asked, smiling at him kindly. The same way she always had when he was a little boy.

Of course he knew that. Aurora was probably the only part of his old life that he could truly say was *good*. So then why was he struggling to respond to her?

"Y... yes?" It sounded more like a question than an answer.

"Good." She sighed, "I'm relieved to hear you say so. I'd be absolutely devastated if you were to think I'm some kind of monster."

Like his father. Like the other scientists. Like everyone else who was part of the W.A.P.

"You—you oversaw *everything*? Every single subject for the enderman project?" he asked, his stomach lurching at the question, his mind refusing to replay any other memory but the boy in the cell.

"Every last one. All 34 subjects across all three studies were under my care until the inevitable conclusion of the experiments." She said, nodding in affirmation, "They'd all wished to remain anonymous, but you can read about them in the study we'd published! I'd be happy to send you a copy if you'd like."

Dream felt sick. 34 subjects. 3 studies. He didn't need to read any stupid published paper to remember that.

*Enderman Study № 3 Subject #00034 transferred to C.R.2. for termination.*

"So... Ranboo..." he muttered weakly.

"Ranboo?" she asked, giving him a curious look.

"He was one of the kids—"

"Goodness, Dream, I don't know where you'd gotten that idea from, but there *were no children* involved in this experiment. Not one. There is no such person as *Ranboo*, and if they did exist, they most certainly were never inside the Wizarding Advancement Project."

Her words stung like a slap, and hurt twice as hard. She just didn't know, she just didn't know, they

*must* have been keeping something from her, right? That *had* to be the case, because Ranboo existed, Dream had solid evidence that the boy was real. If he could just show her the proof, the pictures, she'd *have* to face the facts and realize she was being manipulated!

"But I—"

"Dream, don't you trust me?" Aurora asked, and in that moment the words sounded all wrong.

He looked at the woman who had been like a wise older sister all throughout his childhood, who'd been kind and protective and *good*, and saw a stranger. It was as though for the first time he was seeing her with clarity. In an instant, she stopped being an amalgamation of happy memories and he was able to see her as she was. Not someone who was like him, being lied to by an evil organization exploiting her beliefs, but one of *them*.

"Dream," she repeated, a look of concern in her eyes. "You do, don't you?"

*I don't know.* "Of— of course." He lied, feeling nauseated as she smiled brightly at him.

"Good." She let go of his arm with one final squeeze, slowing her pace a bit so she lagged behind him.

Dream's heart ached. He'd lost so many people already, so much of his family, and now he was losing Aurora too. It wasn't *fair*. Every horrible thing, every loss that he'd experienced, could be tied right back to that stupid organization.

He balled his fists at his sides. He was going to expose them for all they were worth. He didn't care about self-preservation anymore, he wanted justice. Justice for himself, justice for Ranboo, justice for every innocent person his father and his stupid ideals had hurt. He'd find a way to show the entire wizarding world the truth, no matter what it took.

He was so deep in thought that he didn't see Aurora remove her wand from her cloak. He only felt the charm once it had hit, the haze of abstraction passing over his body.

"Obliviate."

~~~~~

Aurora sighed in relief as Dream froze in front of her, the spell taking effect and leaving him with a horror-stricken look on his face.

The situation was... unideal, to say the least. She'd known he was aware of the little experiment, that it had frightened him, but she never imagined that the boy would know so *much*. Was his father some kind of fool? How could he allow such fragile secrets slip out? Now she had to go in and clean up the mess that Selwyn had left behind... as per usual.

It wouldn't be her most efficient work, unfortunately, this location was far too public for her to do as meticulous of a job as she would have liked, but a brief obliviation would have to do.

Aurora inhaled slowly, plunging into the memories of the boy in front of her to extract their secrets.

The very *first* memory she had to do away with were the details of his little outburst. She glossed

over his most recent rebellious thoughts and the pained emotions he felt over losing her. It was quite sad, truly, but what good did those feelings do if they weren't even strong enough to have him convinced that she was telling the truth?

A phrase came up in his mind during their conversation. *Enderman Study № 3 Subject #00034 transferred to C.R.2. for termination.*

Ah yes, Subject #00034, Randolph Maibeloffed Boo. She'd assumed that that's who he meant when he said 'Ranboo,' but it was good to receive confirmation. It meant that she now had a time frame. Randolph was in her care two years prior for roughly a month prior to his termination, so Dream must have encountered him then.

She quickly snuffed out his feelings of betrayal, and then the things he'd revealed during his dramatic performance in front of the class, before quickly skimming back further in his memories.

She glossed over an apology and a boring party she had no interest in, gossiping girls and *weird* discussions regarding the muggle boy Dream was friends with. Was one of those girls interested in Davidson? They were all pureblooded, they really could do much better.

A group project, more gossiping girls, a train ride to school, even MORE gossip, a day in muggle London, diagon alley, and then— some incredibly *strange* conversation. Aurora didn't have time to linger on it, but she couldn't help but get distracted.

"This is all your fault you know."

"What? That you're gay? Am I really that ugly?"

Oh. *Oh*. It wasn't one of the girls who'd been infatuated with that muggle boy, but *Dream*.

She grimaced. How *disturbing*. Surely he had better options than that personality-less, wet rag of a muggle-born. Was he not embarrassed that *this* was the boy who made him realize his preferences? ...No, he wasn't, she'd just checked, and that lack of embarrassment made it even *worse*.

Aurora shook her head. She didn't have time to dwell on Dream's horrid taste in romantic interests.

She skipped further back in time, to the many nights the boy had spent in the Minx estate, and did away with the very frequent, vivid nightmares the boy had had of Randolph Boo. And further still; back to the school and the gossiping girls, back home again, a punch to the face, a birthday party, a letter, multiple letters.

Then a conversation where he revealed the details of the experimentation to— someone. Who? The memory was foggy, too clouded with emotion and tears and *fear*.

Then there was another conversation, this time without the cloudiness. It was with that Slytherin boy that Selwyn had become fond of, practically *adopted*. The one who was always at his heels like some kind of lap dog and seemed physically unable to resist following orders. She was never quite sure why that was.

"Dream. Every time you ask me a question, my goddamn throat feels like it's fucking on fire. Please, please stop. Please."

That explained it. Was he under some kind of curse? It was fascinating, the way the words seemed to pour out of his mouth, telling Dream every last bit of information he could possibly want. Or, at least, it *would* have been fascinating if he wasn't sharing classified W.A.P. secrets.

No matter. Soon that, too, was gone.

And then came the boggarts. Oh how it pained her to recall that lesson *now*.

She should have done away with the memories as soon as she'd been made aware of them. But she'd been compliant, listening when Selwyn had told her and believing that the man's son would get over the fear, that it was a short lived act of rebellion, that he was in a *state of shock*. She would not make that same mistake again.

The entire scene was wiped from his mind, not a trace of the altercation left behind, before she moved on. Back and back, further and further, deeper and deeper until *finally* —

Enderman Study № 3 Subject #00034 transferred to C.R.2. for termination.

That phrase that seemed to haunt her dear family friend so much. Now it would never bother him again.

She was nearing the end of his backlog of memories involving the squib boy, she realized. There was only so much time left for him to have stumbled across the unfortunate sight.

And then there he was. Hunched over in his cell, holding his knees, an empty curious look on his face. It was the same look she'd seen him wear countless times since the injections had begun affecting his memories. The same one he'd worn when he'd proven useless and was sentenced to termination.

It really *was* a pitiful sight from Dream's point of view, but his reaction to it was completely unwarranted and overdramatic. His father had always been too soft on him; it was why he had such strong emotions.

Footsteps sounded from around the corner and Aurora frantically wiped the memory from Dream's mind, releasing the spell before she could check to make sure her work had been thorough enough. It would just have to do.

"*Reparifors!*" she said aloud, faking the charm just as the footsteps came to a stop and Bianca Borealis appeared in front of them.

"Professor Travers, what are you *doing*?" the woman demanded, gritting her teeth as she eyed her wand.

"Why, Bianca dear, didn't you hear my spell? I was attempting to heal the poor boy! Look at him, he's entirely disoriented." She gestured to Dream, moving to support his body against hers as he blinked blearily and groaned in confusion.

"Aha, and why is that?" Borealis narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

Aurora sighed, looking off to the side with an expression of faux concern. "Well, I'm not entirely sure, but I fear he may have fallen ill, or perhaps some students were playing a cruel joke and jinxed him. He was shouting such delusional, ludicrous things in my class, and when I offered to escort him to the Hospital Wing, he suddenly became very quiet and sluggish."

"How *inconvenient*."

"Quite." Aurora nodded.

Bianca huffed, moving her arms into an open gesture, "Well, I'm sure you have a class to finish,

and I wouldn't want your students to miss out on your teaching because you *oh so generously* decided to accompany this young man. I'll take him from here."

Aurora plastered on a smile, handing the groggy boy over to the other woman. "Oh, Bianca dear, you're too kind!" She let her hand linger against the other woman's for an extra second and felt a triumphant surge in her chest when the professor quickly averted her gaze.

"I am only making sure this student receives proper care and that you are doing your *job*, Professor Travers," she said quickly, already guiding herself and the boy towards the Hospital Wing.

Aurora laughed lightly, almost to herself. "Oh, don't you worry. I most certainly am."

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The end of the semester was finally upon them, and Sapnap was fucking relieved.

Sure, he loved Hogwarts and all the shenanigans that came with it, but classes were *so* not his thing. He didn't understand how people could willingly subject themselves to hours upon hours of book reading in the library when he could barely even stand the crap he had to do in class. Like, how the *fuck* did his mom manage college? No-Maj kids had to finish school and then do four more years of extra school, and sometimes another several years of super-extra-school after that! It was nuts!

Exams were a beast, but he did well on most of them. Scratch that, he did *okay* on most of them. He had no freaking clue what he'd take for his O.W.L.s next year, but he'd just cross that bridge when he came to it.

The best part of the end of the semester was definitely those few days of celebration right after exams were done and everyone just hung out. It was the best time to unwind with the friends he loved most.

Especially exciting was the return of the Dream and George friendship. Man, was Sapnap happy about that development. Seeing two of his buddies not even *look* at each other for months had been so damn painful. And the reconciliation was all thanks to him and his epic party planning.

"So, fellas," he addressed the very two guys he'd helped reconnect, "how do we feel about spending some time at my house over break?"

"Yes," Dream agreed instantly.

Sapnap blinked. Well, Dream certainly didn't need much persuasion.

"Rad. So I'm thinking y'all spend a night or two over at mine in the beginning of break, then we do Christmas with our families, then—"

"Oh, I can just stay at yours until school starts back up again."

Sapnap cocked his head, confused. George turned to Dream and said to him softly, "You can stay with me for some of it. My mum would love to have you."

Dream shrugged. "That would work, too."

“Unless, of course, you wanted to spend Christmas with Minx. I would absolutely understand if you did,” George added, looking much less enthusiastic about the prospect.

“Pshh, I’ve had enough of Minx Manor for a looong time, and I’m pretty sure they’ve had enough of me too,” Dream said dismissively. George seemed to perk up at the response, “Besides, I see Minx basically everyday, I need to give her some time to miss me or else she’ll get way too sick of me and probably try to kill me.”

The conversation only served to heighten Sappnap’s confusion. “Wait,” he interjected, “What are you homeless or something? Just catchin the holidays with whatever family has their door open?” Though his tone had been joking, Dream’s deadpan stare told Sappnap that the Slytherin’s home life wasn’t all that funny at the moment.

Shit.

“Oh, fuck, you’re *actually* homeless?” he asked, incredulous. “Since when?”

“Uh...April.”

“Dude, why didn’t you tell me? I could’ve, I don’t know, invited you over or something! My parents could’ve fucking housed you! What was—“

“Sappnap,” Dream interrupted, “I don’t know if you remember this, but I wasn’t really all that popular with our old friends at the time.”

The Gryffindor boy wanted to slap himself. He couldn’t believe that his buddy had literally been homeless for months and thought that some argument between him and George meant that he was forbidden from reaching out for help.

“We’re your *friends*. Trust me, Dream, friends don’t let friends be homeless. Even when they get into arguments. You should have told me.”

The blond shrugged. “It’s whatever,” he replied nonchalantly. “I stayed with Minx and made some new friends. Now I have even more people around me who I can rely on. It’s not that bad.”

Sappnap wanted to say more, but he could tell by the tone of Dream’s voice that the other boy was done talking.

“I guess that makes sense...” He trailed off, turning to look at George. “How ‘bout you, Gogi? We can have an epic Christmas sleepover—“

“I, erm... I dunno if I can make it.”

Sappnap frowned. “What, why not?!”

“I’m working all break,” he said, sounding guilty over the admission.

“Oh...”

Sappnap wasn’t about to make anymore ‘funny’ guesses about his friends’ home life, but that sounded *majorly* boring. Working the entire break all alone? He’d *stupefy* himself if he had to do that shit! At least if he had friends working with him it wouldn’t suck as much ass...hey, wait a minute.

“GEORGE, I just had the most genius idea *ever*.”



"Uh oh." Dream snorted.

"Shut up! Listen man, what if— get this— me you and Dream all get jobs *together* this break! That way we get to hang out and you don't have to miss work!" he said excitedly, looking between the two other boys expectantly. "Think about it!"

"That's actually... not dumb," Dream said, and Sapnap graciously *ignored* the surprised tone lacing his words. "I could use some cash too, to be honest."

"You— you guys don't have to do that," George stammered.

"*Yeah*, but we WANT to!" Sapnap declared. "I know my mom would be *thrilled* to hear that I'm taking on a No-Maj job. She could even hook us up with something!"

George hesitated, looking off to the side. "Well, if you're sure..."

"Sure I'm sure! You'll stay over at my place so we could all catch rides to work together. It's gonna be SICK!"

The other boy's lips quirked up into a small smile. Sapnap was already planning out all the epic jobs they could do together. Just before he could start blurting out some suggestions, however, a dozen or so students carrying frogs on cushions burst into the Great Hall.

George raised an eyebrow. "What—?"

"Ladies and gentlemen," Professor Flitwick grinned, lifting his wand like a conductor would a baton. "To celebrate the holiday season, please give a warm welcome to the Hogwarts Frog Choir!"

Students all around the hall applauded; some even let out *whoop* s of enthusiasm. Sapnap watched the choir settle, then begin to sing on Flitwick's nonverbal command. The frogs started to croak out a Christmas carol while their guardians harmonized.

*"God rest ye merry hippogriffs, let nothing you dismay!*

*We'll feed you lots of little mice and birds on Christmas day!*

*For that is when all problems temporarily go away,*

*Oh tidings of magic and joy,*

*Magic and joy!*

*Oh tidings of magic and joy."*

George burst out laughing. "God rest ye merry hippogriffs?" he snorted. "Is this an actual wizard's Christmas carol?"

"What do you mean? It's an ancient one," Dream whispered back. "I hope they sing 'Little Drummer Elf' next."

As the choir continued to croak out its songs, Sapnap watched the way his two friends subtly

gravitated towards one another even when they weren't speaking. The scene was familiar yet surreal; it really *had* been a long time since Dream and George interacted, but one would never know that looking at them now. The two were basically meant to be best buddies.

Maybe Sapnap hadn't made enough of an effort to help Dream out over the past few months, but he wouldn't be making the same mistake again. He might've been drunk when he first said it, but he really meant it when he'd said they were a team. A *dream* team. And whatever challenges came next, they'd face them together.

## Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! This fic would not be here if it weren't for your continued support, so please please please leave your thoughts in the comments below! We read every single one!

Much love,  
Ken

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